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Last issue's cover art was "Blue Day" by Carlos Queen.

"We are all born originals. Why is it so many of us die copies?"

--Edward Young, poet, (1683 - 1765)

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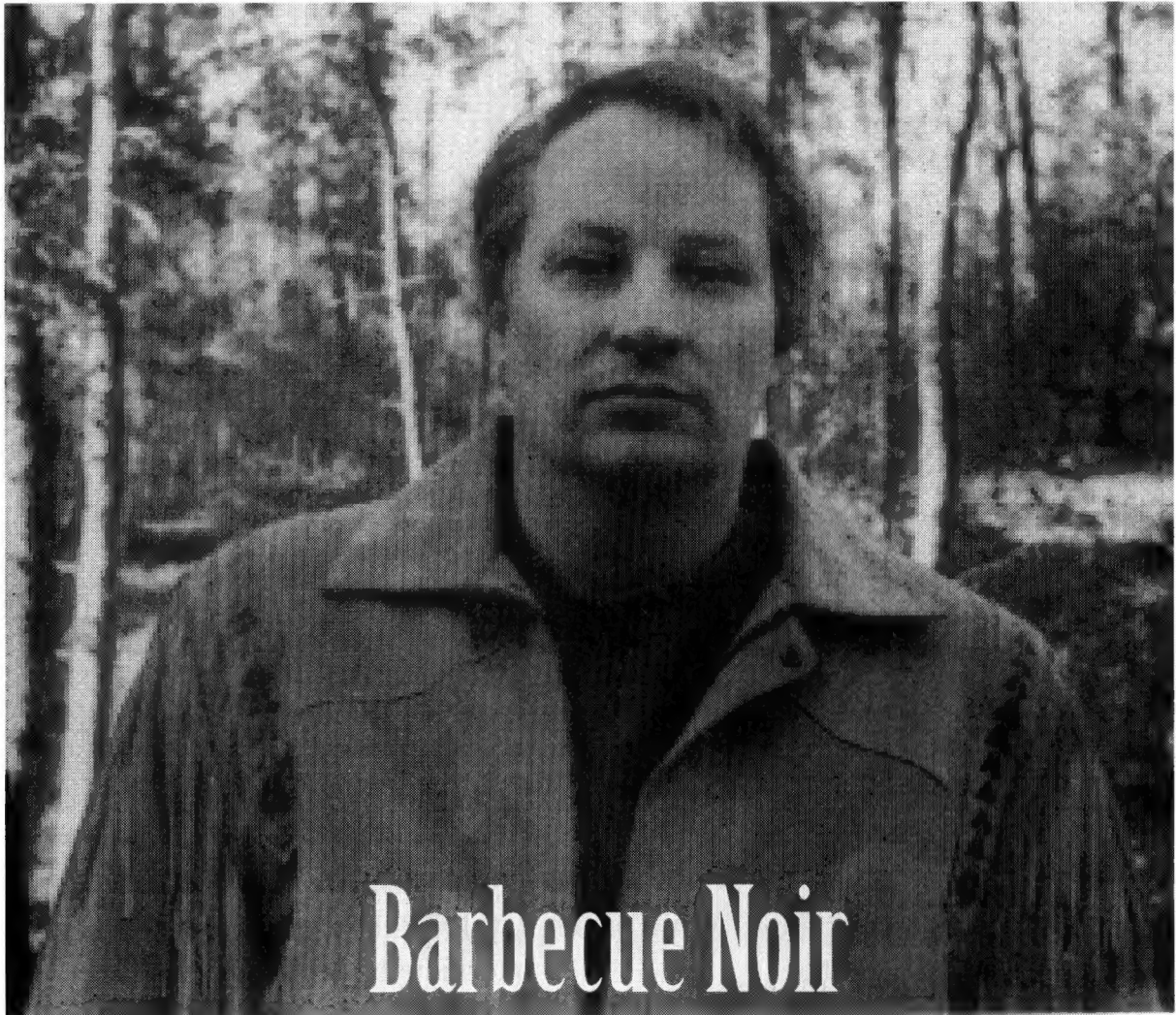
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Barbecue Noir

Joe R. Lansdale

Interviewed by Gene Gregorits

GENE GREGORITS: Hi Joe!

JOE R. LANSDALE: Hi Gene! I'm sorry, I gave you the number wrong, I gave you one. It should have been another one.

GG: (laughs) I was all ready and I had my blood up. I was about to start modifying the number randomly to find you that way.

JL: Well, you called my cellphone also, and I heard it ring, but by the time I got downstairs...but I got your message, so I wrote you. But then I figured hell, the cellphone probably has your number. So...let's do it.

GG: Great. What's the weather like down there?

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JL: Oh, the weather's NICE!

GG: Yeah, when I was trying to call you, there was a violent thunderstorm raging here. Maybe it's better that this is happening later because it seems to have stopped. There was a lot of noise.

JL: Good, good.

GG: What are you working on right now?

JL: Well, I'm kind of between projects. I'm gonna start a screenplay here in about two, three weeks. After that I have a new novel to do for Knopf.

GG: The last thing you did was *A Fine Dark Line*?

JL: No, one's out right now, called *Sunset and Sawdust*.

GG: I didn't know, I'll get that. But the last thing I read by you was *The Bottoms*. Have you written a screenplay before?

JL: I've written four, and all of them have either been optioned or sold.

GG: Most of your novels, the Hap and Leonard novels especially, are very cinematic in nature. They seem written with a very cinematic sensibility, and they would be very easy to translate to film. I've always thought it odd that there has never been an adaptation of one of your books.

JL: *Savage Season* was optioned by John Badham many, many years ago. Then *Mucho Mojo* was optioned, first by New Line and then by Canal Plus. They had a screenplay by Ted Talley, who did the screenplay for *Silence of the Lambs*. It still didn't get made. *The Two Bear Mambo* got optioned after that. I did the screenplay for that, for Propaganda Films. But the guy I was working with moved, and that killed that.

The Bottoms just got optioned and *A Fine Dark Line* is just about to be optioned. *The Drive In* is optioned, *Dead In the West* is optioned. On the whole, all of these things have been optioned and re-optioned, numerous times. And yet, the only film I've had is from a novella, *Bubba Ho-Tep*.

GG: Right, and we'll get to that in a bit. I don't know how the industry works, but do most books get optioned? What's the percentage, do you think?

JL: No, I don't think most books do. I've been very fortunate in that respect. I think that they are cinematic, and I think people spring for that. As to why more of them have not been filmed...your guess is as good as mine!

GG: Where does that quality come from? Did you, or do you, see more movies than read books? Where does the visual, action-movie kind of thrust come from?

JL: I'm both. I'm more of a book person in many ways. I love books. I grew up on comics, which I think have a big influence on the visuals. But I love movies. If I had to choose one, it would be books. And short stories. And after that, it would have to be films and comics. I think that the way I write is far more out of novels than it is out of film, but the imagery-

GG: right!

JL: -is probably inspired by films and comics.

GG: Where does music fit in? What do you get from music?

JL: Music probably gives me the tone. I have to hear music in my head before I can write. Music is the rhythm of the story. I don't listen to music when I write. I find that distracting, so it doesn't help in that way. I listened to music on only one novel I've written, and I really don't know why.

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GG: What novel was it, that you played music with?

JL: Actually, that was a Batman novel. It was Roy Orbison. Stuff that was much different than the tone of the book but that got me through that one. And I don't know why I chose to listen to music for that one. I find it distracting.

GG: What music has been inspirational to you, or given you ideas?

JL: Blues. Through several different novels of the Hap and Leonard series, there is that kind of blues background, like rockabilly, country beat. Johnny Cash is another influence.

GG: Your writing differs from a lot of horror and crime writing. You created a genre of your own, in a way. This combination you have, of comic book adventure, with the real world nastiness. You get into the minds, the pathology of your characters. They are all elements of your artistic world and the vulgarity exists right alongside the slapstick. I've not seen that very often in other books. When did you find that style, when did that click?

JL: We talked about that earlier, with comics, movies and books. All that being side by side as I grew up. I think it was formulating almost since birth. When I really began to get a handle on it was probably about 1986. Before that, I had had stories in a book here and there that had elements of that stuff. But for some reason, about right then, it all jelled. I think that I had had enough time and experience and water under the bridge so to speak, that I was able to do what I had always wanted to do, which was to bring that color of the comics, and that excitement of films, that insight and characterization of the books, and bring them all into one package.

GG: That's what, for me, makes them such fun to read. Because I really don't approach art as something to be entertained by, but more to be informed by, and I like to experience that on a visceral level. Your books provide that, but they're also extremely FUN.

JL: Yeah, I want my books to be entertaining but also to do just what you said. For me, there's always a difference. Once in a while, I'll do something that is purely just fun. And sometimes I'll do something that's a little heavier. But most of my work, I think hits that happy medium between. Because that's how I am as a person. I want to be entertained, but I would rather not have just tapioca pudding. To get through, I like for there to be some echoes beyond the reading of the page. I like for something to go on in the scene besides the scene! A feeling of texture, and some feeling that the characters existed before you knew about them, and that those who survive the novel will somehow, in some alternate universe, continue to go on.

GG: They're almost popcorn novels! Bloody popcorn. The element of the violence, which I don't think has gotten more extreme over time in your work, but there is a sense of you pushing it. And at the same time, you always hated the "splatterpunk" tag. I think that's so cool. Someone needs to stand up and say, "That is not serious writing." When it happened, was that your immediate reaction?

JL: Yeah. I never liked it. I was labeled into it immediately. But the problem I had with it was not the violence. I don't mind violence in novels, or violence in films. I think, in specific films, that works. But I think you can do it in such a way where it is so over-the-top, or so looney tunes, that nobody even sees

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it as violence. Or you can do it as real violence with real repercussions. The problem I had with being thought of as a splatterpunk, or with splatterpunk, was that I thought that it gave people carte blanche just to sit and figure out the nastiest way to kill somebody. The nastiest way to do this or that. To have no other substance other than that. The story, the book or the film, would be about that. And nothing else! There's no echo. And even if you're gonna make it just about that, I thought that it had to have some style, some originality. For me, I don't mean to say that I write message novels, but I like them to say something important.

GG: Well, it's very easy to just wallow in the grotesque. I think it's a lot harder to try to understand people, to get into the philosophy of life. Your books do have a moral center.

JL: Yeah, that is very important to me. People do, in reality, face repercussions. A lot of the stuff I read, in the splatterpunk genre, had no repercussions. The whole thing was a gimmick. It used the violence as a vehicle and expressed nothing beyond that. I didn't want to be part of that. I'm not knocking people who did it! I'm just saying that it seemed limited. All I can say is that the large number of the people who were labeled that way, even some good writers, and people that embraced that flag, have disappeared! It was a fad. People move on. Tags like that are not helpful.

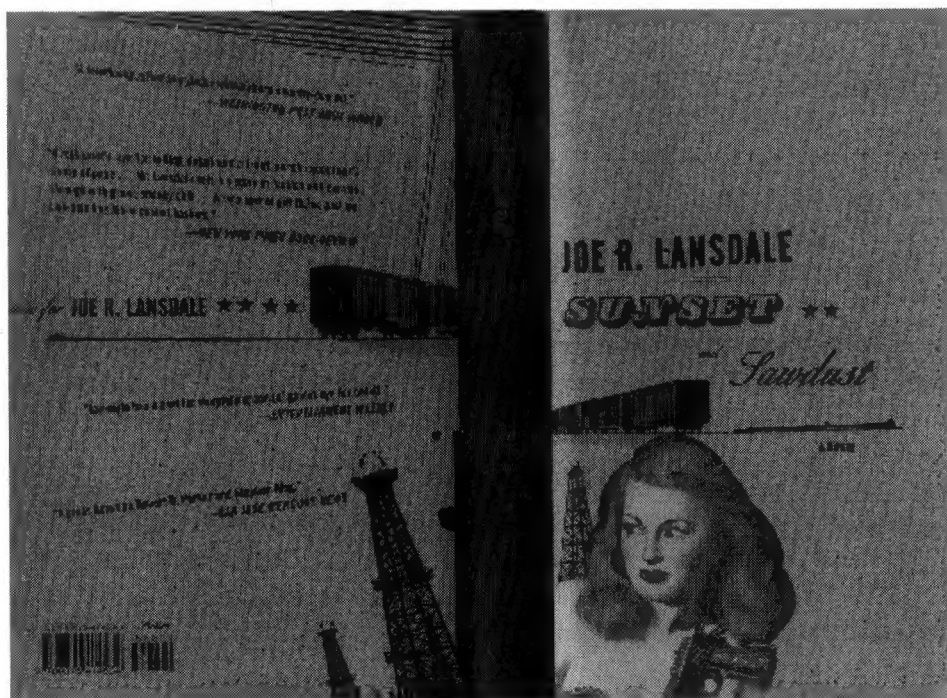
GG: Envelope-pushing is just part of our everyday mainstream culture anyway. That invalidates a lot.

JL: That's absolutely true.

GG: It's subversive now...well, to be moral IS subversive. (laughing)

JL: It is! When I started doing those stories that they used to try and put me into splatterpunk, it was because so much of the stuff was being

done so blandly. I like subtle stories, by the way! I've done a lot of those and a lot of people are unaware of them. I've done them, and some of the novels that contain the violence also contain a lot of subtleties. There was



a trend then to do something different. Everything was vague. It was sort of a rebellion in horror fiction. A lot of us said, let's just go for the FULL TILT BOOGIE here! When we were doing that, I think a lot of folks saw it as about that, and it lost the greater significance, which was being able to use it as a tool.

GG: When you get into the questioning of human nature, the deep stuff, like Dostoyevsky, do you read stuff like that?

JL: Certainly. I read Dostoyevsky. I'm as much

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influenced by that material as I am by popular genre material. I like it all! But the writers I love...well, Flannery O'Connor is a big influence. Fitzgerald. The Great Gatsby and the novella, The Diamond As Big As the Ritz are two of my favorite pieces by him, although I do like others. I love Hemingway, and the essence of things he can create. Things that are happening that he doesn't even tell you about, but you know are happening just between the lines. Faulkner, I love Faulkner tremendously. Mark Twain is one of my all time favorite writers. I just adore Mark Twain. I love the satire of his work, the humor, and those things have certainly been big influences on me, in the same way that stylists like Ray Bradbury and William Goldman have had an influence. Robert Bloch, just in the pure genre approach, and Fred Brown, the cleverness. Andrew Vachss has one of the greatest hardboiled styles there is. Lean and mean and thoughtful. Chet Williamson. Many, many writers.

GG: What are some more recent people you've been interested in?

JL: I like this new book by Terrill Lankford called Earthquake Weather. It's about Hollywood. It's very funny and it's also a crime novel. I'm a fan of his. Neal Barrett, Jr. hasn't had anything recently. His early science fiction fantasies were extremely good because they were insightful and they had a true style. Sense of humor. They weren't just about getting from point A to point B. There was a lot more going on. His crime novels are a hoot as well. A really neat one was Piggs which he did for Subterranean Press. I like James Lee Burke, a tremendous writer. Great style, texture.

GG: Do you have a hard time writing when you're not in Texas?

JL: Yeah, but it's not just Texas. I prefer to write in my house. That's the thing. I wrote half a screenplay for John Irvin, who did Dogs of War. I wrote half of it in England, and finished the other half when I got home. But we lived over in London for part of a summer, and I sort of got acclimated. I wrote half the screenplay there. And I wrote part of A Fine Dark Line in Portugal. But I only did that because I had to. I think I'm gonna have to work on this screenplay I'm about to do in Alaska for a while. I work a very short period of time a day, but I like to have the same time of day, and I like to be able to go down to my study and work intensely. That's how I work best.

GG: You've been very prolific though. It would seem that you do write a good portion of the day.

JL: No, I write three hours a day. Now, when I was younger, I wrote more. I used to write 10, 12 hours a day, when I could. But I was usually working some other job at that time. And when I was working a job, I would get up in the mornings and write. Then leave for work at 2 p.m.. I'd get up at 6a.m, write until noon or so, eat, shower, and go to work. I'd get home at 10 p.m., write another couple hours. On the weekends, I wrote as much as I could. But I also to spent time with my family and later on I was a house dad while my wife was working. As time went on, I was able to have a little more family time, to balance it out. I actually love doin it, I adore writing. But I also do martial arts on a regular basis. It's hard to squeeze a lot of the time in. I do believe that people have a lot more time, more hours in the day, than they actually realize. Because they squander most of it.

GG: Yeah, that's my problem.

JL: (laughs)

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GG: Writing isn't painful for you then. Some writers can sit there for hours without being able to click on.

JL: No. I usually just get up in the morning, go down, and within a few minutes I'm writing. I like to read a little bit in the morning, before I get started. Sometimes I'll read at night before I go to bed. It seems like, when I wake up, there it is. There have been some times when it's been a little harder than others. There have been certain projects I've worked on that were much more difficult than others. But on the whole, it generally comes relatively quick.

GG: I'd like to go into your background a little bit, about the jobs you've worked. Where you grew up. What was your childhood like in general?

JL: I was born in East Texas, in 1951. I was born to a poor family. My father couldn't read or write. My mother had an eleventh grade education. They were really great parents. My father was a mechanic, a real hard worker, a great guy. He's my hero to this day. He learned to read a little bit, but not much. His whole life, you could honestly say that he was illiterate.

GG: He really comes through in *The Bottoms*.

JL: Yeah. But the dad in *The Bottoms* is different

from my dad. There are a few similarities. The Depression era for one. My Dad, he was a good guy. My mother was was a fine person. I had a very well grounded family life. My brother was seventeen years old when I was born. He actually recorded at Sun Records. He was there when Elvis was. His wife, who he met there, actually went to school with Elvis. There's this whole other generation thing going

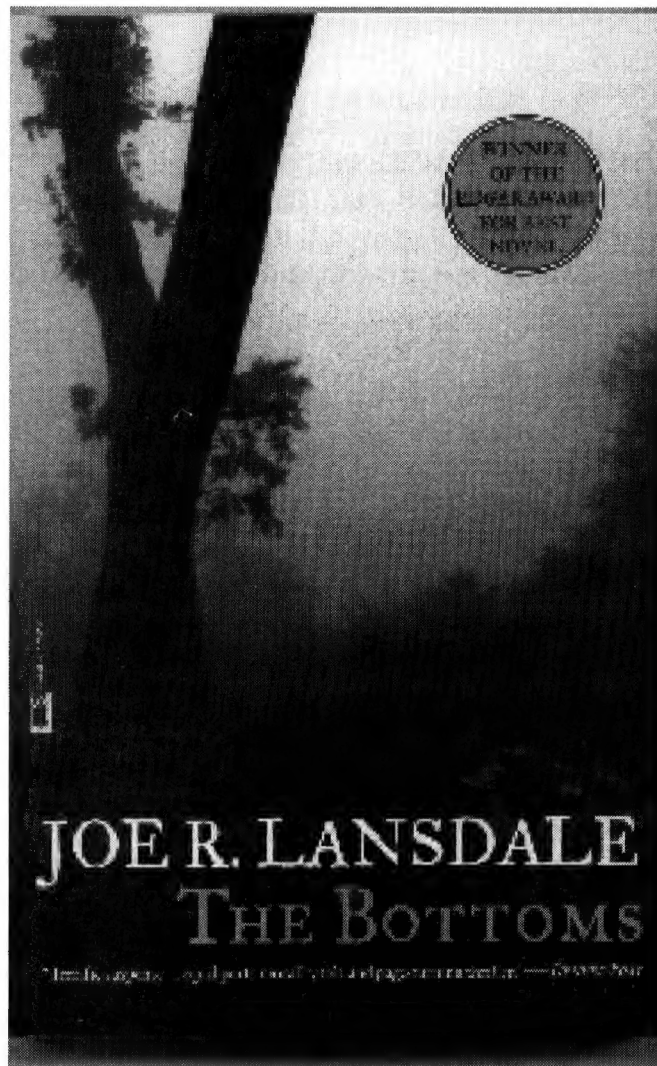
on between us. I think maybe it is due to the strength of our parents that we're very close. Even though there's a big difference in our ages.

GG: High school?

JL: Gladewater high school. I wanted to go to college. I worked in an aluminum chair factory at night when I was going to high school. Me and a bunch of other people. I don't even know if child laws were supposed to allow you to do that. It wasn't just me, but a ton of my friends. The factory was in a place called Owentown. Then I worked in mobile home factories, I did farm work. I was a

bouncer. I did a lot of different things until I went to college. I went to Tyler Junior College a year, and I went to University of Texas almost a year. But I got a divorce at that time. I got married when I was 18.

GG: (chuckles) [Note: I'm laughing here because I also got married at 18.]



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JL: I dropped out for a while. I went back sporadically, after that. I met my current wife, we've been married 31 years-

GG: That's great!

JL: Yeah, we met in anthropology class. But I never got my degree. The writing started selling when I was 21. And by the time I was 29, my novels were coming out. My wife decided, she said, "It's time to go full time."

GG: You sound like Hap Collins.

JL: Hah hah. Well, he is based on me. A lot of the stuff you see in the book, those are experiences I've had. I don't mean the murders and mysteries. But the fact that I worked in the rose fields, just like Hap. I worked at all those shit jobs that he does. I've lived a life very similar to his, or...it's probably the alternate universe life of mine, had I not met my wife, and been successful. I am sort of like the successful version of Hap Collins.

GG: Yeah because you don't sound bitter at all.

JL: No, I'm not.

GG: Do people ask you a lot of cliched, Texas-themed questions? Do you find people making a character of you, as the "Tough Texan" or whatever?

JL: Yeah.

GG: Does that bother you ever?

JL: Sometimes it just seems like such an easy thing, and yet there's another side of it where, yeah, there's a certain truth to it. But it's just so easy to boil it all down to a little cliché. It's like when they talk about the characters, when they say Hap is a white trash guy. Well, he's not! He's a poor guy. He's not a white trash guy. He's a guy that's got good brains, he's a guy that's got a lot of humanity. He's a guy that really cares about people and wants to do the right thing. But he just keeps getting into situations with the intention of doing good, and sometimes accomplishing it, and sometimes, making things worse, and making bad choices. It's just so easy for them to say he's just this white trash guy, and they're a bunch of idiots or whatever. But they're really not. Even people that enjoy the novels don't realize that these characters have depth. And that surprises me, quite frankly.

GG: It surprises me too. People have that problem with some characters, I've noticed, in other books, in movies. It's something Bukowski dealt with.

JL: Oh yeah! I've read a lot of Bukowski. Sure have.

GG: Hap and Leonard do have depth, they do, and...uh...

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JL: Well, one of the problems is that if someone has an accent, then he's a redneck from the south. They're already considered ignorant. That comes in a lot of times.

GG: You're not only dealing with yourself here, and what might've happened had you not met your wife.

JL: Right.

GG: You're also dealing with a perception of Texas which you feel to be wrong. Because you love Texas.

JL: Yeah, I love Texas! And I feel bad to think that they think we're all a bunch of gun-totin' conservative nuts here. Well, we've certainly got a bunch of 'em! But I see those in California and New York too! It's funny, you can have something racial happen in New York or Los Angeles, and of course people yell about how foul it is. But it's like "Oh gee, what an anomaly." But if anything like that happens in the South, even to this day, the reaction is, "Look, it's business as usual". That doesn't mean that there isn't that bad side. That's what I write about. But if I'm writing crime novels, if I wrote about New York, Los Angeles, or Philadelphia, then I'm going to pick the bad side of human nature. Because it's a crime novel! That's what fascinates me, that's what disturbs me. But that doesn't mean that I think that's how all people are. It just means that the people I have created, in this universe, to make them interesting, and to focus on those particular social issues that do interest and disturb me, are like that for that reason.

GG: I've only been to Texas once, I went to... what's the city with the University of Texas tower, where Charles Whitman-

JL: Austin.

GG: That's a terrible way to remember cities.

JL: I just wrote a story kind of about that, actually.

GG: Oh great! (laughs) But there's two other guys from Texas who I think are the most brilliant people, Bill Hicks and Alejandro Escovedo. Do you know their stuff?

JL: I'm familiar with Bill Hicks.

GG: His stuff, his routines, are not that unlike some of your work. The vulgar sincerity, offensive but endearing.

JL: There is a certain part of that that is pure Texas. And that's what I'm saying, it's not all cliché. There seems to be something...I'm not sure what it is, but there's a storyteller tradition in Texas that I think has stayed with us. Although maybe in the generations behind us it's going to be left. I've already started to see it fade. But with me, and with my parents and on down, it was a storytelling generation. The ability to look at stupid stuff and say it's stupid.

GG: Human stuff. Like everybody goes to the bathroom.

JL: Exactly! One reason that in my novels people will do things like that is that I used to read novels and say, "Well when the hell do these people shit?"

GG: (laughing)

JL: Or like, "When do they eat?" Or, "Do they like everything they eat?" Why aren't these things talked about? I mean, surely the guy's gotta pee by now! That doesn't necessarily mean it has to be on every page or anything. I think that when you do those things, you bring a human dimension to those books, that actually make them far more believable. Now, sometimes the language itself can be offensive to some, that's understandable. But it depends on the story. Not all my stories use that type of language, but a

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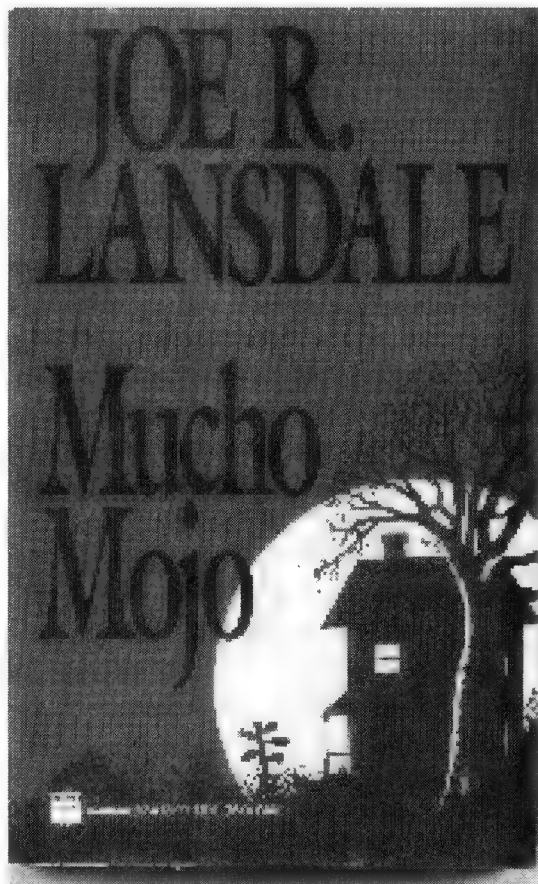
large percentage of them do, because the people I grew up with were blue collar people, and they may not have cussed when women and children were around, but most of them cussed like the proverbial sailor the rest of the time. In fact, across the US, people use that language far more than the Christian right would have you believe.

GG: It's dangerous to get into politics, but...well, just cuz he's from Texas I gotta ask, what are your feelings about Bush?

JL: I hate that son of a bitch.

GG: Hahahahaha!

JL: You know what I mean? He's the president, I don't wish anything ill to happen to him, other than that he is not re-elected. I think he's done everything wrong, he's put this country back in the dark ages. I really wish that we had Clinton back in there, fuckin' those ladies. And, you know, stickin' pussy-wet cigars in his mouth. I'm really sick of this guy, because I think this whole Iraq war is a crock of shit. I think we should have done the Afghanistan thing, continued with that and done what we should've done there. But this whole thing is trumped up, and it seems to me that now, to actually support this guy now, is like Garafalo said, it's like a "character flaw." Because everything he has talked about is lies, I mean...Colin Powell has come out and said, "Yeah, I was misinformed. There were no mobile chemical labs." All of this stuff has just been such a disaster. The economy too! Even though people think the economy is improving, it's only improving for those people that are outsourcing their jobs, and yeah they're makin' a lot of money! Sure! But other people are losing their jobs or the ones they're getting now, are much less than what they had before, and we have a tremendous deficit!



GG: With Clinton, it was like, "Okay, but he's a human being, he's got his weaknesses. He's got a weakness for the ladies." With Bush now, "Well, he's only human. He lies every time he speaks. No one's perfect." Or people don't see that. I don't know how his lies aren't more obvious to his supporters.

JL: Well, the truth of the matter is that most people were willing to say that about Clinton. Nobody wanted him out of the office, except for the staunch Republicans. When they had the polls, his popularity was really high. When he left office...had he ran again, he would have been elected again. All this stuff is after the fact. The polls show that most Americans said, "So what? Even if he is doing this, so what? This doesn't affect me!" The way I look at it, Clinton may have been fucking those women, but Bush is fucking ME. That's the way I look at it. For me, what is more, the fact that this guy has character flaws...I mean, I hate that for his family, I'm sure that's a tough thing, but that's his business, his

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problem! But here's Bush now, and here's all these kids that are being killed. They're the age of my son! Or my daughter! I'm thinking, what are they being killed for? What have we achieved there? They said, "Well Saddam was a BAD MAN!" Well, there's bad men in Iran, and Pakistan, and North Korea. We're not bothering them! And we actually know THEY had weapons! But we're gonna get rid of this guy so he won't sell weapons to the bad guys. Well, the bad guys in Pakistan sold weapons to North Korea, and it was the Russians, I believe, who sold them to Iran. All this is, is one big blowjob that's a lot worse than the one Clinton got in office.

GG: Um...

JL: Sorry.

GG: No, this great. But we're gonna get off that-

JL: (laughs)

GG: We're gonna do a 360 and get back to Leonard and Hap. (laughs) When did you first decide that you were going to do a fictional character modeled on yourself? And did you know that that time that you'd be bringing him back as a recurring character in a series?

JL: I never intended to make it a recurring character. A friend of mine, Sam Griffith and I, had been through a lot of these experiences, living cheap. And he's a judge now, which is interesting. We'd lived on the edge, we'd both come from poor families. We'd gone through the sixties. I thought for a long time that I'd like to write about the sixties experience in some way, and at least touch on it. And I couldn't find a handle on it. One day I decided I'd just write about how I lived back then. I wasn't gonna bring in the whole counter-cultural thing, I'm just gonna write about how I lived then. We were more *The Return of the Secaucus Seven* than *The Big Chill*. So I started writing about these characters standing out back shootin' skeet. As I was writing about it, it just unveiled. I

didn't know there was gonna be a Leonard. Then when he came into it, I got the idea that he was gay. And then gradually, as time went on, I said "Of course!" It's because I had seen some things about some black Republicans, which at that time was fairly rare. And then I saw something about gay Republicans. I had a friend who was a gay Republican. And I thought, "That's odd. What the fuck are these guys doin' for you?"

GG: (laughs)

JL: So it all kind of came together in this character. When I got through with *Savage Season*, it was three years until the next novel, because I never intended to write about 'em again. I wrote another novel for Mysterious Press. When I finished it I was unhappy with it and I pulled it. And I sat down and wrote *Mucho Mojo* in four months. Because Hap's voice just would not leave me.

GG: That was the second book?

JL: I did another Hap and Leonard novel the year after *Mucho Mojo*. I took a year break from them, then did *Bad Chili*. I skipped a couple years, and came back with *Captains Outrageous*. Now, I haven't done one for about three or four years.

GG: It's funny that in your version of the unsuccessful Lansdale, you imagine yourself married to this tough ass black guy, who is homosexual and votes Republican.

JL: Hahaha. They're not married. They're friends, which to me is even odder.

GG: Your experience in a dysfunctional, co-dependent bachelor relationship seems to be pretty extensive. The details are what make it work. That Leonard likes vanilla cookies and gets pissed off when Hap eats them.

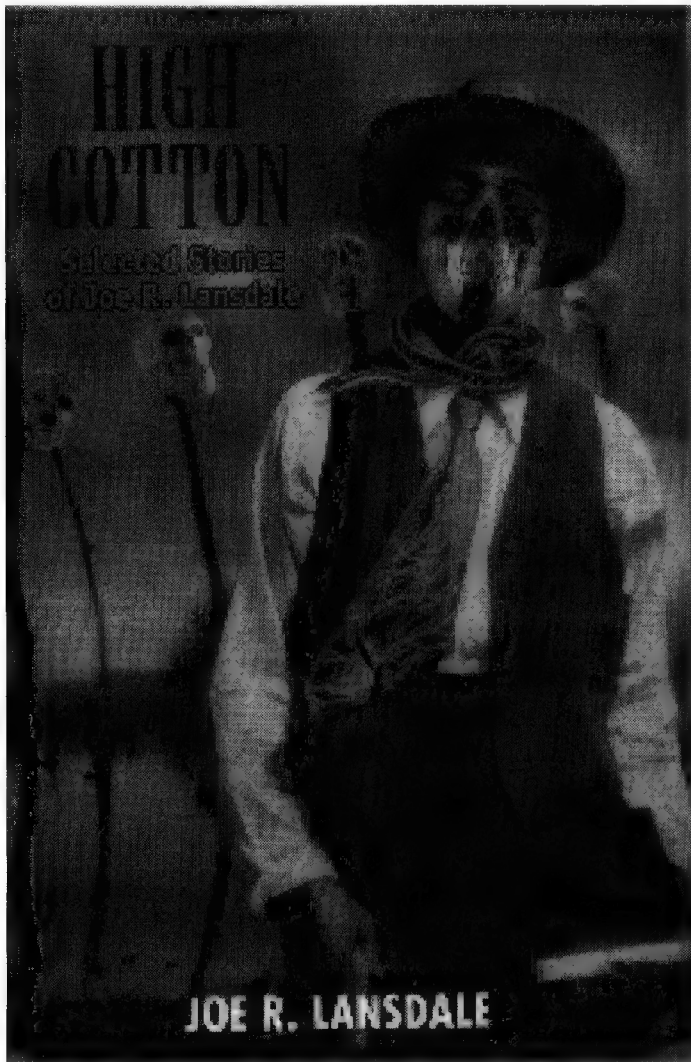
JL: My friend Sam, I thought he was like a fussy old maid! He wasn't gay, but just that experience added to Hap and Leonard. Every time you live with somebody, be it a heterosexual relationship

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or a homosexual relationship, or just a friendly relationship, people develop certain ways of dealing with one another. And all these little things come out! I just thought that was funny. Here's these two guys. One's heterosexual and the other's homosexual. They don't have an intimate sexual relationship, but they have a relationship that's not too unlike husband and wife in some ways, and it's like brothers in another way.

GG: Thinking of Leonard and Hap in their golden years-

JL: (chuckling)



GG: What? That would be an AMAZING sitcom, some day when you can say "cock-sucker" and "motherfucker" on ABC!

JL: Oh yeah. That's right, they're pretty foul mouthed.

GG: What the last thing that really inspired you? It could be something you saw in the street, or a headline, or anything. In terms of your writing.

JL: I won't say too much about this, I don't wanna give it away, but just recently I went to Houston to do a signing. I spent the night in the hotel there. There was so much noise on the highway, I felt like an illegal alien in a U-Haul trailer all night long.

GG: (laughing)

JL: So when I woke up the next day, that gave me an idea for a story. It started coming to me in waves.

GG: When you were a bouncer...and this is my last question. Hap is a bouncer in your books. Did you experience the kind of violence he did, when you bounced? Are you as good a fighter, or did you play that up a little?

JL: I'm a ninth-degree black belt. Grandmaster of the Shen Chuan martial arts system. I'm four-time inductee into the International Martial Arts Hall of Fame. Since ya ASKED!

GG: Hahaha.

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JL: I've been doin' this 41 years, as a martial artist. So...I'm pretty good at it. My system is a sanctioned system now, Shen Chuan. You can find out more about it on the Internet, if you're interested. In bouncing I never had all the horrible things he had happen, but I had a few things here and there.

GG: (laughing) When was the last time you had to kick someone's ass?

JL: Oh god. Long time ago.

GG: Hah hah hah.

JL: Long time ago. Probably in my thirties. At the martial arts school, once in a while, I've had a couple smartasses come in. Had to give 'em an attitude re-adjustment.

GG: Have you ever lost a fight?

JL: Well, so far, no. That doesn't mean I can't. But I certainly haven't, so far.

GG: My last question, then. Did anything you wrote ever bother you so much right then that you censored yourself?

JL: Nothing ever bothered me right then when I wrote it, if I felt it was proper for the story. I think that art doesn't always have to be polite. Art's often messy and it's not always about what you want to happen. It's about exploring ideas. A lot of my books, I think you can tell when I'm saying something that I believe in. Sometimes I'm playing with ideas. There have been many times when I've looked back on something and went, "Whew! That was intense." There's a short story called "Drive-In Date" that I almost didn't write. It's probably the toughest story I ever wrote. It's in High Cotton.

GG: That's on my stack, but I haven't read it yet. What's the story about?

JL: It's about two serial killers, but it's at a drive-in. It's just this casual conversation they have with the dead body in the backseat. And what goes on. My intent was not to be splattery. It was my intent to show how these people do not always have the obvious faces of monsters. They might be crude or rude, but they could be the guy next door. That's the scary part, to me. I wrote it simply because it scares me that these people are around. It was one of those stories that really went to the edge. I decided that that is as far as it went, for me. Actually, from that point on, I have gone backwards. I have pulled away from that more. If a story really called for it, if it was necessary, I'd put it in there. *Sunset and Sawdust* has some pretty violent scenes in it. But it is a really different kind of book. It's got wild scenes in it, it's got humor in it. 1930s female protagonist. It's an interesting book, I think. There are some scenes that are pretty violent.

GG: Has your wife ever objected to anything in your work?

JL: No, not really. She's read most of it. She proofs a lot of it and stuff. It may not all be to her taste, but I don't write for anyone but me. I am fortunate that she does like most of it. She really likes *Sunset and Sawdust*. She liked *The Bottoms*, *A Fine Dark Line*, and *Freezer Burn*, which is a very brain damaged novel.

GG: It's a strange suggestion perhaps, but have you ever thought of writing a romance novel?

JL: As a matter of fact I have! I actually have! Isn't that strange? But if I did, it would still be peculiar. I don't think I could write anything traditionally. Not straight.

GG: In many of your books you deal a lot with that. The romance between Hap and-

JL: Brett.

GG: Brett, yeah. That's incredibly real. But

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there's always the bashings and stabbings to spice it up.

JL: Well, what's strange is that the Hap and Leonard novels really have a lot of female fans. And I think a lot of it is Brett.

GG: She's really fantastic. Brett Butler is always who I think of, or a version of her.

JL: Yeah! There could be that connection. It works! I actually met a woman once, on one of my signings. She talked like that, and she was just funny as hell. She was a Texan, and she was a redhead. And my wife is a redhead! But my wife is much quieter. But she can be very funny. They kind of came together. And of course, you airbrush it to fit the story. I just thought, man, this is an interesting character. A lot of women readers like the books because of her, but they also like Hap! They say, "This is the guy that I want! This guy's sensitive." In spite of all the terrible things that go on in these books, they seem him as a sensitive character. And you know what, he is! In his own way, he's just a big sap. That's what Bruce Campbell said about me, come to think of it. He said, "This guy's all rough and tough, but I think he's a SAAAP!"

GG: (laughing)

JL: And I think he's right.

GG: Okay, last question. What did you think of Bubba Ho-Tep?

JL: I adored it. It's about 95% of my story. Almost all the dialogue is my dialogue.

GG: It gets you right, in the sense of your atmosphere, and obviously the dialogue. The problem I had with the film was that...well, it kinda bummed me out to think that the first Lansdale film would be a feature length adaptation of this short story about two old guys and a mummy. I was hoping, really, for the big one. Do you see that happening?

JL: I told you about all the options. Ridley Scott has optioned my work. David Lynch has optioned it. I think it's just a matter of time, really. In some ways, you know, you could say that it is amazing: they've had all these options, and none none of'em have been filmed. And in another sense, it's amazing I've had that many options! Most writers, even good writers, never have anything optioned, and certainly not filmed. There are several things in the works right now which imply to me, that they will be filmed. Don Coscarelli and I just talked about a new project this morning. So who knows.

GG: I'm not a huge Tarantino fan, but he seems perfect to do one of your books.

JL: He probably would be perfect for some of my work.

GG: When you first realized that they were gonna go ahead with Bubba Ho-Tep, were you surprised, did you think that it was sort of odd that out of all of your books-

JL: Without a doubt.

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GG: The story is very you, and it's very sentimental, but you know, it's kinda goofy.

JL: Yeah, it's goofy. When Don came to me and said he wanted to option this, I actually did tell him, "Don, you don't want to option this!" He optioned two of my stories. He optioned "Bubba Ho-Tep" and "Incident On and Off a Mountain Road". I could see that "Mountain Road," yeah, they might make a film out of that, then he ended up with "Bubba". I said, "Don, look...it's just too WEIRD!"

GG: (laughing)

JL: "We're talkin' about old guys with cancer on their dick, and Elvis is such a foul-mouth fucker, ya know?" I said, "You're dealin' with all these icons." I think it's actually very sweet to those icons. I think people may not see that, they may not understand that, on the surface. And visually, when there's a guy layin' around in a bed with a pus-filled dick? I said, "Don, what are we gonna do here?" He said, "I'm certain I can do it." So he optioned it, and the second time he came back I tried to almost talk him out of it, but I had to just take his check. And the third time I just said, "Shit, gimme the money!" And then...damned if he didn't do it! He then asked me to do the screenplay and I turned it down because I didn't think it could be done! He turned around and did a great screenplay. I'm very happy with it. You can't beat Bruce Campbell and Ossie Davis! There just terrific.

GG: Yeah, they really are great in the film. Absolutely.

JL: But the film was made on a shoestring.

GG: That's another thing. It would take quite a bit of money to do Bad Chili or something.

JL: Well, what I would say is this. I have heard people say, "Well, you know this thing could have been a little bit better in the special effects depart-

ment, or something like that,." And I said, "Well, if you'd have given him the money, I'm sure he woulda done that!" With the money he had...I actually liked it the first time I saw it. But every time I see it I like it better. It really grows on me. I think he did a brilliant job. It was a very difficult job. But I'm amazed that it's my first film, and shocked, even. But later on, I got to thinking about it. This is the right one. I have such a connection to low-budget, B-films, in so many of my works, that it's only natural that this should happen. And also, you really want the really weirdo goombaa, you know, over the top thing to come out before the mainstream stuff. So I think it was the right first film.

GG: Who do you see as playing Leonard and Hap?

JL: It varies over time, because the actors get older. There's different people. They almost had it. Mucho Mojo was optioned, and as I said, Ted Talley, who wrote Silence of the Lambs did the screenplay, adapted Mucho Mojo. They were talking about this guy Josh Lucas who-

GG: Oh he's great! He was just in Wonderland!

JL: He was gonna be Hap. And Don Cheadle was gonna be Leonard.

GG: Perfect.

JL: Perfect. Woulda been great. But it just didn't happen. I always saw Sam Jackson, and at one point I saw Jeff Bridges. Now I think he's gotten a little too old for the part. But those two appealed to me. Several others. Billy Bob Thornton was talked about for Hap. So there's been a lot of people who could've done it. The truth of the matter is that when I first wrote him, I saw him Leonard as Sydney Poitier. Isn't that strange? Because that's totally different than how anyone sees him.

GG: I always saw Leonard as very thin. Not that Poitier is big or anything but-

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JL: Poitier is actually a very average sized guy! And that's the way I saw Leonard. He's tough but he's- he's probably 6 foot , but he's not a monster. That's how everybody perceives him, because he is tough, and he has that attitude.

GG: I just see him as being scrappy.

JL: Scrappy, yeah. I thought Cheadle was a good choice. And Josh Lucas is an actor that I think could do it. I see the character as older than Josh Lucas. But nonetheless, I like Josh Lucas. He's a guy that I see as probably having a big career if he gets the right films.

GG: My favorite movie from last year was this movie Wonderland. Did you see it?

JL: No I didn't, is that good?

GG: Aw, it's amazing. It's the darkest film in years. It's about John Holmes and what happened after he fucked up his porno career.

JL: John Holmes, yeah! I heard about that, but I didn't see it. But yeah, I think Lucas is great. I'm hoping that there is some revived interest in Mucho Mojo right now, and I'm hoping that it comes around. They're two actors that I'm still fond of!

GG: Okay, last question. Cats or dogs?

JL: Dogs. Big time. I have cats and dogs, but cats are kind of...you know. They're here. But dogs...I got a dog laying right beside me right now. It's a...big old HOUND.

GG: Thanks Joe. It's been great.

JL: Alright, bye-bye.

-BQ-



Not With a Bang
But a Whimper

fiction by Monica O'Rourke

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*This is the way the world ends This is the way the world ends This is the way the world ends
Not with a bang but a whimper. -- The Hollow Men by T.S. Eliot*

"The worst of it is, they're kids. They don't know . . . can't understand, can't be held responsible. That really is the worst: when you see a kid . . . and you got to put it down."

Harley sipped his beer bottle only, no tap -- no telling what might be floating in the tap line these days. He threw back his head like he was about to bust a gut laughing but came back up with a poker face. His Stetson was tilted to one side, but that was unintentional. It just flopped that way.

"They's all Rotters, though," the bartender said as she wiped a shot glass with a bar rag. "No use feelin' sorry for 'em, Harley."

He shrugged, and looked somewhat disgusted. "It's that sort of thinking's what keeps me sane. But it still ain't easy when they're so young. You can't help but feel sorry, Rotters or not." He took a sip from his bottle. "You never had kids. Did you." Not a question; almost an accusation. He thought about his own son, now dead. And he thought that maybe the boy's death had turned out to be a good thing, considering. Not that he really meant it, not really, not at all, but he was grateful that his boy didn't have to go through this. He chastised himself for allowing the morbid thought to pass through his brain.

It was the bartender's turn to shrug. "No, no kids." She quickly changed the subject back. "They ain't human no more, Harley."

He paid his tab and left a generous tip and walked out into the sunlight. Sometimes it was easy to forget he'd been drinking so early, and daylight could be a surprise. Like going to a movie matinee -- some things were just better suited for night.

The list juttred from his hip pocket and he pulled it out for the hundredth time that day. Mostly descriptions and possible locations. Names were included but weren't useful in his hunt -- they no longer responded to their names. He hunted, for those parents who wanted their kids back, no matter what condition they might be in. No matter what condition Harley would inflict on them. This is what he'd been reduced to, he'd think bitterly. Goddamn truant officer with a pistol.

He didn't bother with a motorcycle -- which most people assumed he drove (hell, Harley was his birth name, not his vehicle of choice) --and climbed into his Ford pickup and headed toward the sticks. Tim Gorman had last been spotted in the Highland Woods area.

He shouldered his backpack, locked the truck and headed into the overgrown forest that was known as The Highlands. Long pants and heavy work-boots protected him from the elements, particularly rattlers, prevalent in these mountains. He'd hiked about half a mile in, marking his trail by spray painting small red Xs on tree trunks, when he picked up the boy's trail.

He assumed it was the boy's. There was evidence a young man had been here, particularly this young man -- tatters of the Megadeath T-shirt he'd been wearing were draped over shrubs, caught in brambles and prickles. He'd be hiding, Harley assumed. One thing the Rotters shared was an uncanny sixth sense, a knowledge of danger. Maybe just instinct (who knew?) but it was there, prevalent, thick and heavy and overwhelming and, perhaps, even dangerous. Mindless, destructive monsters with even a hint of common sense scared Harley. Even with their now-limited brain function they knew to hide from the rest of the world, until that maddening hunger drew them back out into the open. "Come on, kiddo," he mumbled, treading carefully over branches and mulch, drying patches of mud squelching beneath his boots.

He stopped only long enough to wipe his sweaty forehead with a bandana. Harley's search for the Gorman kid had taken the better part of the morning. Finally he spotted the boy -- though Harley used the term loosely, because Timmy was almost a man, big and cumbersome in life, now just ogreish

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in death.

Something hung from Timmy's mouth like a chew toy. Something long and fat like a branch but decidedly hairier. This something was clutching a small blue backpack, which hung suspended from its gangrenous fingers.

Timmy ripped out chunks of flesh with his rotted teeth, and pus dribbled from his facial lesions and soaked his meal. Not that he seemed to mind.

"Awww, Christ." Harley groaned, wiping the spittle out of the corner of his mouth. Bile clawed up his esophagus and into the back of his throat and he swallowed twice, three times to keep his breakfast down.

There was no hope for this one. Too far gone, too many days had passed and Timmy was a full-blown Rotter now. Carefully Harley aimed, shooting off the top of Timmy's skull. Enough of his face was still intact so that the family would at least have the comfort of receiving the body in recognizable condition. Not that Timmy much resembled what he had in life, but Harley knew this still brought them some sort of relief.

Unfortunately, head trauma was the only really effective way of dispatching a Rotter, and as long as Harley removed a good part of the gray matter, he knew the job was complete.

Harley tagged the body and added the name to his report. When he returned to his truck he called it in to Dispatch, who would then notify the Recovery Crew. Hopefully they'd get there before animals or the elements -- or some other Rotter -- got to the boy first. Normally the crew was timely, but lately business had exploded and they could barely keep up.

Two left on the list for the day. Twin girls. He shook his head as he studied their pictures.

As he drove, he wondered about the survival of the human race. Whatever this was, this disease, this infection that had doomed the children was dooming humanity. Newborn Rotters, chewing and clawing their way out of their mothers' wombs, or children changing into these flesh-consuming creatures . . . going to bed per-

fectly normal, parents breathing a collective sigh of relief and falling to their knees in supplication suddenly finding themselves fighting for their lives against their ravenous monstrosities in the middle of the night. No one knew what had caused the disease. Or how to cure it, despite children being studied, examined -- autopsied. It was no longer safe to try to keep them alive. They had become too much of a threat.

Harley's job as a police officer and his proficiency with his firearm made him the perfect candidate for this detail. A job he despised. Calls from frantic parents had disturbed him at all hours of the day and night at home. Threats. Pleads. He'd heard it all. Warnings that if he killed their baby they would hunt him down and --

But this was all part of the job. So he'd had his phone number changed and unlisted and the calls stopped.

The kids (he could never bring himself to think of them as Rotters) tended to take to the woods. They avoided the towns. Maybe it was something instinctive, maybe somehow they felt safe. Safe.

Molly and Melissa, age six. Born three minutes apart. Changed into Rotters only that morning, and had last been seen heading into the woods behind their house. Woods that covered hundreds of miles, however. One thing about Rotters, though -- they didn't move too quickly at first. They could attack at rapid-fire speed once the illness had advanced, but they tended to travel slowly, as if lost, as if unable to decide where they wanted to go. And the younger ones, the ones who had not yet developed social or coping skills, the ones who had been clumsy in life and were just getting used to their own bodies were even slower.

It took Harley about an hour to pick up their trail. The air was thick in that part of the woods, swampy, almost soupy; hordes of mosquitoes and black flies assaulted him as he made his way through the dense foliage.

A short while later he spotted them in a clearing, huddled together as they rested beneath

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a weeping willow.

"There you are, girls," he whispered, catching his breath, closing in on them. He left his pistol holstered as he crept quietly through the bushes and approached them from the side.

One of the girls lifted her head, looked in his direction but didn't seem to have spotted him. The girls appeared almost normal; the telltale vacuous expression wasn't usually evident until several days after the change began. But the other signs were obvious -- the oozing sores, the distorted, runny facial features -- as if the kids had been dead for days and were walking the earth again. And the animal-like demeanor, the snarls and grunts and mindless predacious instinct, made it clear these kids were no longer human beings.

Their first impulse at this early stage was to run. In a few days they would turn predator, savage. But for now they fled. The first Rotter twin finally spotted Harley in the brush and took off into the trees, her startled twin remaining behind to watch the girl run.

Before the girl could react and chase after her sister, Harley pounced, knocking her on her back. She snarled at him -- language was the first thing to go, it seemed -- and tried to bite, to claw at his face. The abnormal strength that would inevitably come was also not quite there yet, so her struggles were manageable.

He hog-tied her hands and feet behind her back and muzzled her before chasing after her twin.

The second girl hadn't gotten far and was attempting to burrow her way into a rabbit hole. Harley grabbed her ankles and pulled her out of the ground and tied and muzzled her the way he had her sister.

"I ain't gonna hurt you, kid," he said, lifting her up and returning to the spot he'd left the other girl. He then picked up the second girl as well -- both children struggling furiously beneath each arm -- and carried them back to his truck, carefully laying them in the covered flatbed.

"Harley, come in."

Harley returned to the cab and picked up the radio. "Go ahead."

"Where you been, Harley? Been trying to reach you for an hour."

"You know. Huntin' is all," he said. "What's up, Homer?"

"Just wanted your twenty, Harley. Making sure everything's good."

Yeah, he thought. Just swell. "Everything's fine, Homer. I'm in the woods behind junction three. You sure my location's all you wanted?"

Static hovered in the air for several seconds before Homer finally replied.

"The captain would like to see you as soon as possible. We need you to come in."

"Why? What's wrong?"

Static again. Harley stared at the radio in his hand.

"Just come in, Harley." Something strange about Homer -- his usual hard edge had softened.

Harley nodded at the radio. He'd report in. Right after he took care of the twins in the flatbed.

His house wasn't far from junction three and he arrived there less than ten minutes later.

He pulled into the driveway. Sarah's car was gone. Odd. One of them was always home; it was what they'd worked out. What they'd agreed to.

Harley unlocked the front door and poked his head inside. "Sarah?" No reply. He left the door open wide and went back to the truck to retrieve the twins, hoisting them beneath each arm and carrying them into the house. He slammed the front door shut with his foot.

When he opened the basement door, the pungent odor of decaying flesh burned his nostrils. He'd never get used to that smell, like sulfur and rotting fish, like gangrenous flesh baking in the mid-day sun.

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He took a deep breath of hallway air before plunging into the fetid stench that waited for him a few steps away. In the basement, he carefully laid Molly and Melissa on the dirt floor and prepared their spots.

This was getting worse, much worse. There was no denying this was a progressive disease.

In the far corner of the room, the little boy once known as Jason Wheeler was developing into something unrecognizable. What had been pockets of pus sores were now runny leaks, consuming his limbs in ebola-like fashion, distorting his face into a mass of spongy tissue. His nose was missing, the cartilage having dissolved into his cheeks. Black holes filled his mouth, nubs that had once been teeth gnashing and snapping at Harley. That little boy, all of eight years old, was now a misshapen mess, a caricature of his former self.

Around the room: the same. The children he had brought home to take care of and feed and love, the ones he could not bring himself to destroy, were evolving around him. Quickly developing into terrifying things without rational thought, becoming creatures intent on killing and eating and nothing else.

He had hoped and prayed every day that a cure would be found, that if he held on to these children that maybe they could be saved. And Sarah had agreed to this since the beginning several months earlier, was worried about the poor children that the rest of the world seemed to have given up on.

Even though what they were doing was against the law.

Even at risk to their own safety.

He wondered where Sarah was, why she had left the house unattended when they had agreed they never would, that it was a dangerous risk. And he suddenly wondered why Homer had sounded so uncomfortable on the radio.

"Oh, shit . . ." Quickly he chained Molly's and Melissa's wrists to their new spots in the basement, working carefully, and untied then and removed their muzzles, the girls looking confused

and terrified.

Around the room, the other Rotters reached for Harley, and for each other, tried to claw and chew their way out of their restraints. He knew they would settle down after he left. They always did.

"Sorry, kids," he said, ascending the steps. "I'll feed you when I get back."

He returned to his truck. "On my way in," he said into the radio. "Homer? You there?"

"Yeah, Harley, 'course I am. See you soon."

He wondered why he hadn't asked Homer about Sarah. He thought maybe he didn't want to know; that if there was bad news he wouldn't have wanted to hear it over a dispatch radio. Not that Homer would have told him anyway. Not over a blasted radio. Like last time there'd been bad news -- it hadn't been delivered over a radio. It had been delivered by three officers who were like brothers to Harley and who could catch him if he fell hysterically to the floor. Not that that had happened; Harley had retained control. And then he threw himself into his work to keep his mind far away from the horrible accident. Keeping himself busy around the clock prevented him from having to think about his own life.

The warm summer air blasting his face as he drove didn't help with the queasiness in his stomach. Half an hour later he arrived at the police station. Despite driving with the siren and speeding along the back roads doing sixty, he was too far out of town to make it there any quicker. When he pulled up in front of the station, he spotted Sarah's car.

The relief he felt when he raced inside and saw his wife sitting on the bench was enough to make him break down and sob.

Sarah threw herself into his arms.

"Oh thank God," he cried, holding her tight. "I thought something happened to you."

She shook her head and he saw that she had started to cry.

"What is it, baby? What's wrong? What are you doing here?"

"Patrick," she said, wiping the tears away

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with the back of her hand. "It's Patrick."

"Patrick? What?" He blinked rapidly, and his heart pounded in his ears. "What about Patrick?"

Sobbing now, unable to speak, she just shook her head and clutched his shirt.

Captain Mellner came up behind Harley and laid his hand on Harley's shoulder. "We need to talk."

"No," Harley said, emphatically shaking his head. "Patrick is dead. There's nothing to talk about."

Mellner took Harley's elbow and led him into his office. He shut the door. "Sit down, please."

Harley sat, unsure his rubbery legs would have supported him much longer.

"I'm just going to spit this out. There's no way to sugarcoat it."

Harley nodded slowly, little specks of white light dancing before his eyes. He'd never felt faint

before, not even when Patrick had died in the car accident, not even when he'd had to identify his little boy's dead body. Not even at the funeral, while viewing his four-year-old son's tiny body in his tiny blue suit. Not even then. Control. That was what it had been about. If Harley had lost control -- if Harley had been forced to think about these events, which were impossible for a parent to think about -- he would have lost his mind.

But now, somehow he knew what Mellner was about to say, and now the specks bobbed and flashed before his eyes like the Aurora Borealis.

"It's not just the living children who are developing this disease. It seems to be reanimating . . . the . . . uh, the deceased," Mellner said, sitting on the edge of his desk, leaning forward as if prepared to catch Harley before he tumbled out of his chair and on to the floor.

"The caretaker at the cemetery called

earlier -- "(Digger, that's his name, aren't all cemetery caretakers named Digger?) -- and he said . . . Patrick's grave had been dug up. His and several other children's."

"Grave robbers," Harley muttered. "Some sick fuck --"

"No. He saw Patrick heading out of the cemetery gates."

"Oh, Christ no," Harley cried, burying his knuckles in his eyes. "This can't be. Please tell me this isn't happening!"

Mellner wasn't exactly the comforting sort and gingerly patted Harley's shoulder. "We called Sarah in. We wanted you both here. In case Patrick . . ."

In case Patrick comes home.

Harley looked up sharply, his hands dropping into his lap. "I gotta get home."

"No, Harley. I'll send a car to your house."

Oh, Christ. That was all he needed. He'd just heard the second worse news of his life and didn't think things could plummet any

further. But if those officers went inside his house, and opened the basement door . . . hell, his entire house was permeated with the rotting smell from the children. They wouldn't have to step much further than the front door to know something was dreadfully wrong inside.

"No, Captain. I have to go home."

"Harley, I'm telling you, you're not going anywhere. You know as well as I do what the S.O.P. is for this. Parents are not allowed anywhere near their children."

Harley swallowed. "Then let me go with the officers. I won't go alone."

"No, Harley, you --"

"Captain, please. If it was Aaron, wouldn't you demand to go?"

The captain winced at the mention of his son's name. So far Aaron hadn't caught the disease.

"All right. I'll send Tompkins. Ride with

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him.”

Harley returned to the hall and Sarah looked up at the sound of his footsteps connecting with the tiles. Sarah. He’d forgotten about her.

“What’s going on?” she asked, clutching Harley’s arm, digging her nails into the flesh.

“It’s okay, baby. I’m going with Tompkins back to the house.”

“Oh, Harley,” she said breathlessly. “The house? Oh, no . . .”

“It’ll be okay. I’ll think of something.”

“I’ll go with you.”

“No, baby, you can’t. This is a police matter now. Why don’t you go on over to your mother’s house? Don’t drive, Sarah. One of the guys will take you there.”

“Call me, Harley,” she cried, eyes wide with terror. “If anything happens, you call me.”

“You know it, babe.” He kissed her softly and caressed her cheek, trying to comfort her but knowing he wasn’t successful.

Tompkins’ attempts at pleasantries and sympathy were appreciated but ignored. Harley knew the procedure, knew what Tompkins was attempting, and he didn’t want any part of it. The forty-five minute drive back to his house -- Tompkins driving the speed limit, the moron -- was interminable.

“This bucket go above forty-five?” Harley snapped, breaking his silence.

“Sorry, Harley. We’ll be there soon.” And Tompkins broke into another soliloquy about how sorry he was, how he’d want to die if anything like this should ever happen to little Ginny.

Harley thumped his head against the glass and tried to ignore the man’s voice.

Finally they reached the house. They sat in the car in the driveway and stared at the front door for almost a minute.

“Might as well go inside,” Tompkins said.

“No, let’s wait here. We’ll see him if he comes.”

“Not if he comes around back, Harley. Besides, it’s too hot to wait in the car.”

Tompkins got out, his boots crunching on

the gravel. Reluctantly Harley followed, and stood beside the car.

“We can’t go in,” he said. “The place is a mess. Sarah would have a fit.”

Tompkins looked over at Harley, shielding the sun with his palm. “What’s going on here, Harley?”

“What?”

“You’re acting strange.”

“Think about what’s happened to me today, and then think about what the fuck you just said.”

“No, man, it’s more than that. I don’t mean to sound like a heartless bastard, ‘cause I do know what’s happened to you today. But Harley, man, you’re acting like you’re hiding something. And you know the law, okay? You know you can’t do what I’m pretty sure you did.

“There’s still time to fix this. I don’t have to tell anyone I found him inside the house. Okay, Harley?”

The blazing sun wasn’t helping matters. Harley felt clammy and chilled at the same time, and his bowels clamped up the same instant his testicles crawled inside his body, as if trying to seize them.

“Tompkins,” he croaked, “you don’t understand. It’s not like that. Patrick’s not inside. I just found out about it in Mellner’s office.”

Tompkins started walking toward the house.

Something was stumbling toward them from the woods beside the house. Something small, very small, something human-shaped but not quite human, something pitching and reeling and trying desperately to climb over deadwood and saplings.

“Holy sweet Mother,” Tompkins said, undoing the snap on his holster and releasing his sidearm.

Harley came up behind him and pressed his gun into the back of Tompkins’ head. “I swear, you have no idea how sorry I am. But I can’t let you do this. I can’t.”

“Don’t, Harley,” Tompkins pleaded.

“Don’t do this. You know what this means, man.”

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Harley raised his arm and smashed his gun into the back of Tompkins' head. Tompkins crashed to the ground like a bag of wet sand. Patrick had reached the edge of the woods, about five yards away now.

The child had been in the ground for several weeks and the decay was evident, even from this distance. Harley shook his head, ignoring the stench that assaulted him from ten feet away. Much of the flesh was missing from his son's face, seemed to have melted away. Part from the car wreck, part from rotting in the ground, part, probably, from being a Rotter. A sob tore out of Harley's throat as the boy approached.

Tiny fingers clasping and unclasping, vacant eyes staring at Harley although Harley imagined the child didn't know what he was seeing. The shredded remains of his tiny blue suit, hanging off the child's body. Dark hair matted with dirt, alive with whatever maggoty insects had burrowed their way during his climb through the soil from his casket, and nested in with his baby's body.

This was his boy. His child. His flesh and blood, the light of his life.

Patrick had come home.

He subdued the boy easily -- his police training had taught him the proper method. Despite the child's attempts to bite his father, to tear the flesh from his face, Harley had him under control. He carried Patrick into the basement and chained him in a corner of the room. Harley slumped onto the bottom step of the short stairwell and cried. How would he ever be able to make this right? How was he ever going to explain this to anyone?

"Jesus, Harley . . ." Tompkins stood at the top of the stairs, the gun that was aimed at Harley's head slowly slipping in the cop's fingers until the muzzle was aimed at the floor. His eyes weren't on Harley, they were taking in everything else in the basement.

A few steps separated Harley and Tompkins, and Harley reached up and grabbed the officer's leg, pulling him down the steps. Tompkins, his shock catching him completely off-

guard, went flying headfirst into the center of the room.

He landed between several Rotter children who wasted no time advancing on Tompkins. Even if Harley had tried to help, the Rotters had moved too quickly, tearing out chunks of flesh, ripping off the top of the man's scalp and digging out handfuls of brain. Within seconds the man was dead; he'd barely had time to start screaming.

"Oh, God," Harley moaned, his breath hitching, his empty stomach dry-heaving. This wasn't supposed to happen, no one was ever supposed to get hurt. He was only trying to save the kids -- this wasn't supposed to happen! Slowly he turned around and walked up the steps, not wanting to see what the children were doing to the fallen cop.

Harley stumbled into the kitchen and leaned against the fridge, bent in half, breathing deeply. The light specks had returned and he fought to keep from passing out.

He picked up the phone, dialed his mother-in-law's number and asked for Sarah. When she came to the phone, Harley was crying.

"You okay, Harley? What happened?"

"Come home, Sarah."

"Is -- is he there?"

"Yes," he said, fighting tears so he could speak. "Yes he is. Come home, Sarah. I need you. I don't know what to do." His fingers clawed at the smooth surface of the wall phone.

"I'm on my way, Harley. We'll figure this out."

"Please hurry, Sarah," he moaned. "Your son needs you." Harley slumped down the length of the wall and squatted on his haunches, the phone dangling from his fingers. He tilted his head forward and sobbed into his hands.

From the basement, the little boy called for his daddy. --BQ--

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Interview with Beat-Man

- John Oliver

About 7-8 years or so ago, I ran across an ad in a magazine (Maximum Rock & Roll? Flipside? I don't remember...) for several new releases by a record label I'd never heard of - Voodoo Rhythm, operated out of Switzerland of all places. The records looked crazy as Hell - there was one by Roy & The Devil's Motorcycle, and a couple by a Lightning Beat-Man, some crackpot dressed like a Mexican wrestler, complete with Mil Mascaras mask and bizarre costume. One was a solo 10" by this self-proclaimed one-man band, and the other was a full-length with his band, the Never Heard Of 'Ems. The ad, beseeching its readers to "prove you have no taste in music and buy these" claimed that these were "records to ruin any party." It also contained the address of the label's owner, this same Beat-Man. I wrote this gentleman, inquiring about his records, the cost, shipping charges, etc. He responded in a very rude manner - something along the lines of - "send me all your money, and I'll mail you the fucking records"..... just the kind of thing that I find hilarious, as well as endearing. I ordered these records. Dug the Hell out of them, and even reviewed them in an old issue of Brutarian. Over the next few years, I ordered several other gems from Voodoo Rhythm.....45s, LPs and CDs from Beat-Man's other band, The Monsters, Elvis Pummel, Die Lowlander, the Rat Hole Sheik, and other assorted luminaries. The records were always very primitive, stomping roots rock & roll, with yelled/screeched vocals, seemingly made by nutty psychopaths whose enthusiasm far outweighed any musical talent (if not taste). In other words, these records were right up my alley.

Since my initial exposure to this label, Beat-Man has discovered and recorded a goodly number of other bands and acts, including: the Hormonauts (surf music); The Waltzloves (cajun music with an accordion); the Get Lost (trash garage); King Khan and His Shrines (twisted R&D); The Dead Brothers (a funeral orchestra playing blues and trashy rock'n'roll); Die Zorros (per Beat-Man, a strip club band); Hipbone Slim and the Knee Tremblers (more garage trash), the Come 'n' Go (ditto); and others. His newest discovery is Zeno Tornado and the Boney Google Brothers (some sort of fucked-up country music, I believe). Oh, and Beat-Man reinvented himself several years ago....discarding the wrestling mask and taking up the Good Book as Reverend Beat-Man (with an album to his credit). The Monsters have also put out 5-6 albums over the years, with their music ranging from demented rockabilly to trashier rock'n'roll.

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Over the past year, our very own founder Mr. Salemi also fell under the spell of Voodoo Rhythm, and he asked if I'd like to interview Beat-Man... a task which I gladly accepted. We decided to do it via email, as Beat-Man lives in Switzerland and I'm in the USA. Below are my emailed questions and Beat-Man's VERY entertaining answers..... enjoy.

P.S. While Beat-Man's English is very good, for the sake of clarity, I've cleaned up some of his answers....but hopefully, have kept the content and spirit of his answers pretty much intact. If I've failed, I suspect I may hear about it.

BRUTARIAN - First of all, Beat-Man, we are huge fans of yours and your record label. While you attempt to portray your record company and its artists as rank amateurs with no talent, and their records as in the worst of taste and sure to "ruin any party," in fact we consider Voodoo Rhythm records to be among the very best in primitive roots rock. You're like a smaller version of Crypt or Estrus or Fat Possum. Any comments on our opinion?

BEAT-MAN - Take it easy over there monsignor... Those 3 labels you mention are all killer labels, and you can also include Bad Afro or Tear It Up or Norton or Gearhead as well. I think these labels are all run by people who love music more than the business. Or maybe I only can talk for myself, as I'm a total loser when it comes to making money. As soon as I sell a record enough to make decent money, I spend this money on another band nobody knows. I'm a total freak for new things, who has his roots in rock'n'roll music. I see rock'n'roll all over - when I go to a electronic event, I see rock'n'roll, or when I walk down streets in any town, I feel where rock'n'roll is... it has so many faces. My passion and my way is to find everything rock'n'roll and give it to the people, because they have to know that this is the best thing ever on this planet. Forget about politics or religion... rock'n'roll is it -- it's totally fresh and it keeps you going. I think all those

other labels have that spirit, too, and they are searching for the kick... they want to be different and they want to colour the world up.

BRUT - Do you make any money putting out these records/CDs, or do you lose a ton?

BEAT - As I said, I'm a terrible loser, but I'm Swiss you know, so I know how to handle what money I do have. I don't have a lot of money, but I can pay all my bills. Next to the label, I probably spend the most of my time playing gigs with my bands, and that money goes into the label as well. I work pretty well with my pot of money. I sell pretty well for a small label, and I'm very proud on that what I have built so far. You know, I'm from Switzerland, a country with NO rock'n'roll background, a country that's not even a part of the European community but it was always a dream for me as the young Beat-Man in school to have my own record label. I was addicted to Krokus, AC/DC, and Kiss, of course, and it was my dream to put out records and play music. I was also into making record covers - instead of learning in school, I made record covers for Kiss and other obnoxious bands.....and now I have a label and bands, and I play all over the fucking planet. Nobody ever told me that you can't make money with rock'n'roll. Shit. I think I made a mistake again.

BRUT - Are you a big enough rock star in Europe to warrant your own groupies? If so, could you describe a typical Beat-Man groupie?

BEAT - I'm not really much of a cliché rock'n'roller, you know, I'm a fucking reverend. I can't look at those miniskirts and that honky tonk shit, it's forbidden to me. Actually, I don't like groupies - they run after something they'll never get from me. They want to have lots of sex, but most of them are like cheap records - you listen to it once, then throw them away or they get boring. There are also male groupies, did you know that? I have them but what I like are girls,

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girls who say something, girls with power in the ass, girls who are gonna change the world. I found one who I fell love with, totally insane love with the blessing of the church of trash blues. She's the most beautiful girl I ever saw and met in my life, she is so fucking cool I could write you a book about her and stuff...but she lives very far away from me in LA..... so we use our voodoo power to be together everyday.

BRUT - A little bit about your musical background, please. For example, how long have you been playing? We've seen you in various guises -Lightning Beat-Man, Reverend Beat-Man, and just plain old Beat-Man (in The Monsters)..... any others we

should be aware of? Also, how many bands have you been in over the years?

BEAT - I started making music when I was 13 years old (1980). My father made his biggest mistake ever, he bought a guitar for me. After that I was lost - I played every day, but I was bad. I

went once to a guitar school for one hour, then we had to play "Yesterday," and I left. I watched how guitar players on TV held their fingers for playing on the guitar and I made my own chords out of that. 20 years later I found out that those were all real chords. I thought I invented them.....stupid

Beat-Man. But anyway, I'm a horrible guitar player. Sometimes they ask me to play guitar for a band in theaters or stuff, and I just can't follow those guys. I can't read notes or music - all I can play is my music, that's it.

My first one man band I had was when I had my first guitar. I called myself Taeb

Zerfall, and I recorded hundreds of songs with my father's hi fi equipment tape, to tape that ping pong you know -- primitive overdubbing. Some of those recordings I used for the first Lightning Beat-Man 10 inch, but actually when I recorded that stuff, everyone thought it was shit except Oliver M. Guz (die Zorros, Jerry J Nixon). He wrote



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back and we traded our stuff.....but he was way better, my stuff was trash. I was into Einstürzende Neubauten, Venom and Elvis back then. In 1984, I had my first new wave band with the name Anti Statek. We recorded a song in a studio, "Tote Schatten"- totally dark wave stuff, and we even went into the local radio charts with that one.... and we only did a tape of that... Also at that time, I started my own tape company, Zerfall Tapes. In 1992, I changed the name to Voodoo Rhythm.

In 1986, we started with the Monsters - 2 guitars and drums in the beginning. For old geezers, we came across and too punk, but for the punks, we were too greased up.. shit, another mistake. Then in 1990, I played in a band called The Coronets. We recorded several singles - that was Hammond organ garage punk boogaloo. In 1992, I went to the USA for a half year, and we went to ALL the thrift stores that were around at that time, and bought tons of records. In a sex shop in LA, I found a Mexican wrestling mask and I thought.... wow, cool.... why not a one man band dressed as a Mexican wrestler and fighting against myself and the guitar? That would be fun... I went home and did it under the name Lightning Beat-Man. Then Robert Butler moved to Switzerland from LA and he had a band, so I supported them on their first tour and people liked it. I had offers to tour with several bands as driver, roadie and support act, so I went across Europe with that. The show went from a support act to a big wrestling event with a whole band, and every show got more extreme each day. I broke something in my back, and I had to stop in 1998 or so.

I also did several other bands together with Robert such as : The In-Sect, or O.J. and the Dead White People or The Dry Heaves. Then, in 1999 I started as the Reverend Beat-Man. I just saw the light and I had to do it. With the Reverend, everything is possible. I play most shows as a one man band, but when the fee is good, I play with the Unbelievers, or sometimes with the Church of Herpes - that's an industrial band I play with sometimes. I also play drums for Die

Zorros, that's a strip joint band.....that is totally fun, one of the best bands I ever played in; people just don't get it at all; great.

BRUT - Please name some of your musical influences, other than the obvious, such as Hasil Adkins, Jack Starr, and the Legendary Stardust Cowboy. What are your favorite records of all time?

BEAT - Oh fuck there are so many, man.....too many. I have a sorted record collection and on most records, there's at least one super killer song....but it changes how I feel. Do you know Lou Ralph's song "Dead End Street"? Killer, ha? Absolutely everything by Howling Wolf, he's the best musician of all time.....next to Hasil Adkins. Then, I've had a big love since my teen years for Rose Tattoo - I've listened to those guys at least once a month since the early 80s ... I love Q65, I love Eartha Kitt, she's the most and makes me warm in my heart. Johnny Cash, for sure.....the Nat King Cole Trio.....Django Reinhardt, the Yardbirds.....and I like lots of stuff from rockabilly to jazz to punk garage, punk trash, soul, cajun, bluegrass, elektro trash hip hop. **THE EYES?** "I Rowed Out".....one of the best punk love songs ever...

BRUT - I bought my first vinyl LPs from you via mail order back in 1997 or so (Lightning Beat-Man EP and LP, Roy & The Devil's Motorcycl's EP and LP). As a matter of fact, I reviewed these releases in an old issue of Brutarian. Over the next 3-4 years, you only released a small handful of records/CDs (45's, including those by The Monsters, Die Lowlander & Elvis Pummel, among others, and several CDs/LPs - Monsters, first Waltzloves and Dead Brothers releases). Suddenly, around 2002, your activity increased significantly, with another 10 or so CD releases by a batch of new bands (King Khan, Hormonauts, The Get Lost, Die Zorros, Del Gators, Hipbone Slim & The Knee Tremblers, The Come and Go,

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etc.). How did you discover these new acts - via live shows, or did they send you tapes, or what?

BEAT - Yeah, I started slow with tapes, then I wanted to make only my own records, but then I saw so many cool bands, so I had to start to put out other bands as well. Roy and the Devil's Motorcycle were the first band I put out where I'm not in the band, and that's a killer record. They are just recording a new one for me.....they are more into the Velvet Underground these days. Nowadays, I get tons of tapes and cds coming in, to the point where I have to say sorry to some of the bands who never heard back from me. it's just too much work, between the label, the bands, and my son. Sorry, I try to respond to all the mails I get, but sometimes there are too many. However, sometimes I get stuff from bands and I think - THE WORLD HAS TO HEAR THAT..... THAT IS THE MOST ORIGINAL CRAP I've EVER HEARD ... TOTALLY MAD BUT GOOD ... So I usually put out about 1 record a month, or sometimes it's 2 in a month, depending on what I get. My newest discovery is Zeno Tornado and the Boney Google Brothers; it's a bluegrass kind thing with very sick lyrics, it's totally killer, believe me. Also, the Monsters' reissue of Youth Against Nature just came from the pressing plant, and I'll be putting that out.

Some of these bands you mentioned, I discovered through seeing their live shows. With King Khan, it was like I was playing in Germany 4 years ago, and somebody told me that there's a guy in Kassel who looks like Screamin' Jay Hawkins and does a mix of soul and punk music. What would you say as a label if you heard that? I called them up, and they sent me a tape, and we did the record. The same with the Dead Brothers - something like 4-5 years ago, somebody told me he'd just seen a funeral orchestra covering Hank Williams songs and the Animals with a tuba and a crazy, out-of-his-head singer. GIVE IT TO ME BABY. Almost all the bands on my label are totally different, they are all fantastic live bands and are each unique. I really like that - the bands on my label all have

their own language to say rock'n'roll, they are all good, and nobody's ever heard of 'em. So open up your eyes and start searching again ...

BRUT - Whatever happened to Elvis Pummel? How about Roy & The Devil's Motorcycle? Whatever happened to your old band, the Never Heard Of 'Ems?

BEAT - Elvis Pummel, he is fantastic, still does live gigs.....he is a totally weird entertainer, these days he plays with his home organ but he can't, that's so fucking Dada.....a great super weirdo, but most people run out when he plays because he's strange. He's like Hasil Adkins, the last real rock'n'roller (Iggy Pop died a few years ago), he is 100% proof that you never get the big bucks when you make real rock'n'roll. That's why we love Hasil so much, or am I wrong? He did several other singles, one on Swamp Room in Germany. The Roys are in the studio right now, they always need a long time to do something new. They are now over the more psychedelic drugs. I think they came a bit down, and now make a fantastic mix from trash to the Velvets but live, they're still a winner. Like the Country Teasers, people run away when they play....they are loud and make noise, sometimes too slow and sometimes too fast - it's not dance music, it's music to ruin any party. I love this band, they are all brothers and they act like a clan.. fantastic ... If you have the chance to see them, GO ... You are never going to forget them, believe me. The Never Heard of 'Ems, they are now both the Unbelievers and Get Lost, that's Robert Butler, Chris Rosales Janosh and Gerry Mohr.

BRUT - Do you plan on re-releasing Voodoo Rhythm records/CDs which sold out? (Examples: Roy & The Devil's Motorcycle LP/EP, first Walt-zloves LP/CD, various 45's)

BEAT - Yeah, I'm working on that stuff, also the first Lightning Beat-Man 10". I want to put that

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out again with some other songs on it.....it's just hard to find the tapes from that stuff, most are on some cheap tapes and some direct cut and so..... this one is going to take a lot of work. I'm also going to reprint the first Waltzloves album when I make their new album. Guido from the Waltzloves now has 2 new bands, the Cool Jerks and the Superhelicopters. Both are fantastic. Regarding the Roys, I'll do the same - I'll re-release the first album together with the new one. It depends on how much money I have. I also intend to make a DVD with all my Voodoo Rhythm acts, with clips, interviews, and and and...

BRUT - I remember buying 45s and LPs from you that were on labels other than Voodoo Rhythm - a 45 by the Mysterious Asthmatic Avenger, and an LP by the Rat Hole Sheik,

Mad Cow Disease, to name two. Are you still selling non-VR records/CDs like these?

B_M - It was just way too much work for me, also doing the mail order, so I kept it very small, so I don't sell that stuff anymore.....only a few you can see my whole list on .

BRUT - Do you have any new discoveries you'd like to tell us about. Are there any other great roots rock unrecorded bands in Europe that You're getting ready to spring on us?

BEAT - Yeah, my fave at the moment are the Cof-finshakers from Sweden, they make kinda funeral country music or something like that. The singer is 20 years old and has a voice like Johnny Cash, totally brilliant. Then I found out about Volt from Paris...I wanted to make something with them but they never got back to me, but they're worth checking out, great elektro punk... Then there are the Dixie Buzzards, I want to make something with them.....the Hormonas out of Italy is a great rockabilly trash band. And

then I'm working on a album with John Schooley, another one man band act. I'm always searching for new bands. I'd like to find a Klezmer punk act or a swing punk trash tango country blues band maybe.

BRUT - Where's your favorite place to play, where you get the best reaction?

BEAT - We have good reactions all over the world.....no kidding.... but we just went down to Argentina last month

and Brazil, and that was the burner. This was something like another dimension, then we went to New York and this was killer too, it was the first time we played in the USA, and it was just great ... I love to play all over. The most people we played for is in Germany - it has varied from 300 to 2,000 people and more on festivals. This is very good for us, we now have an offer to play in Russia. I will check that out as well soon and tell you. I like to see reactions from our audiences.....I always pushed this with the Lightning Beat-Man shows a lot, looking for bad reactions like riots. I loved to see them when they're so fired up and angry that they were wait-



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ing outside with baseball bats, wanting to beat me up... After that, you can say - yeah, baby, I did a good show, one that they'll remember. These days, though, I'm older, and I guess I'd rather get a good reaction from the crowds. But we have played from jazz festivals in Montreux to squats, all over.

BRUT - Do most of your bands play live in Europe? If so, what's the possibility of packaging about 5-6 of them and touring the US? We assume money, or the lack thereof, would be the primary obstacle.

BEAT - They tour Europe, but it's really hard to find any booking agencies or backing to come over there. it's too risky from a financial standpoint....all my bands are unknown in the USA, and today people wanna have music and stuff they know, they like normal music, and they're not willing to search out strange stuff. Voodoo Rhythm is not normal so my bands have it very hard, but they are all KILLER live acts, like the Come'n'Go, that's the best live band You're ever gonna see in your life ... Four teen punks play trash blues as fast as it's gets..... a great wild stage performance..... I try to book shows for them but most of the agencies say nobody knows them. What the fuck.....refer me to an agency in the USA and I'll send Come 'n'Go over and the burn the USA to the blues ground, believe me.

BRUT - How were your recent New York shows? Where did you play, and how was the reaction?

BEAT - We had the honor to play at legendary Maxwell's and CBGB's. Mike Decay and Kandra did a great job for us, we had lots of people and we didn't expect anything. You know it was our first time in the USA, and we thought maybe they know only our first records, which were basically Psychobilly.....and we thought maybe they were shocked when we trashed out.. and we did like only crazy Swiss motherfuckers can, and they loved it... We met lots of great people in New

York, they gave us money, food and places to stay.....they showed us the town, very very nice people. Also, at the shows they were open to our music. You know, CBGB's is more like a tourist place. It was disappointing when I saw it, like a factory.....but the crowds were killer and we had some really super great bands to play with us, like The Brimstones and the Fantastic Kings of Nothing. If they hadn't already had a record deal, I would have knocked on their door and signed them. We also played with the Monkey Butlers and, in Brazil, the Butchers Orchestra.

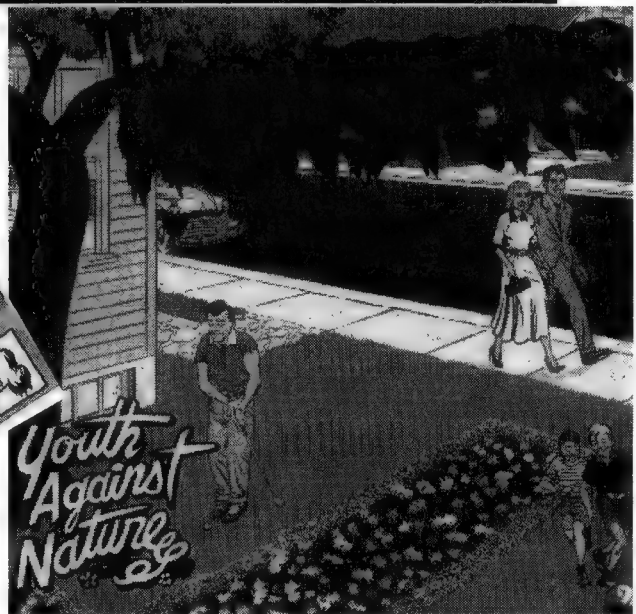
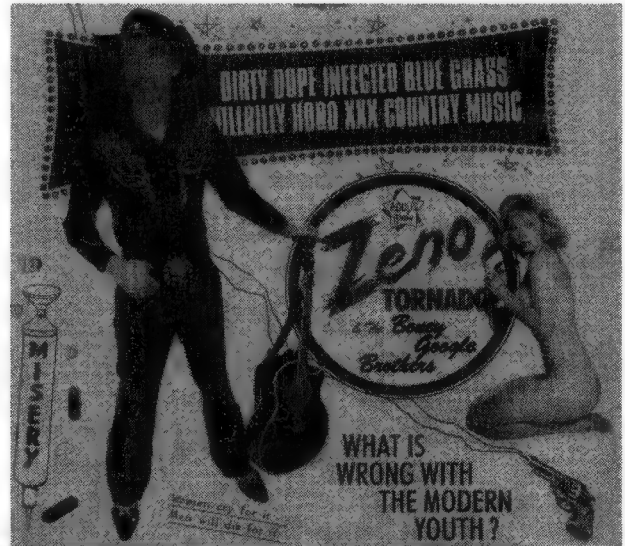
BRUT - Apartment wrestling never seemed to catch on at all in the US, except to a small group of fanatics. US pro wrestling magazines only covered the sport for about a year or so. Is this sport bigger in Europe? Do you follow pro wrestling in the US at all? If so, who are your favorites? We assume you're a Mil Mascaras fan, as Lightning Beat-Man used to wear his mask.

BEAT - There's a group in LA who promotes Mexican wrestling events, Lucha Va Voom is their name, and I keep up with what they're doing. You are right about apartment wrestling, it's more of a nasty thing, not actual wrestling; it's not really something for the whole family. We tried to push that a little in Europe and we had several apartment wrestling headquarters in Europe like Dresden, Germany or Madrid and Amsterdam. We'd go to apartment wrestling parties and beat each other up, then have sexual activities. Regarding my favorite wrestlers, I'd say Mil Mascaras, Hijo Del Santo and Duro Duro.

Note: The name in Beat-Man's response was "Cel Santo", which is either the deceased El Santo or his son, the still active Hijo Del Santo; I assume it's the latter. Duro Duro was, at one point, the bass player of the Never Heard Of 'Ems.

BRUT - For an enjoyable time, and to buy some stuff, please check out Voodoo Rhythm's web site at www.voodooorhythm.com. --BQ --

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Single Hit by Gary Fry
illustration by Kelly Moore

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The little bastards were everywhere. Oh he shouldn't think in such terms, it didn't become him, yet how else to account for the swarming mass of mindless goons? This would teach him not to travel into the city centre outside of a school day. After taking early retirement last year he'd vowed never to get involved with children again. The classroom had lost its status: no longer an academy of knowledge, rather a clinic for damage limitation. In the States kids had begun taking in guns with their pens and notebooks, and how far behind were we? Struggling on through the raucous record store - British sale racks dominated by American culture - Barlow halted to browse the typically diminished 'classical' section.

For thirty-five years he'd taught the whole syllabus of academic subjects at a modern comprehensive in Bradford, a true polymath. However he'd always preferred music, a subject of universal appeal that drew people together. Witness the current mob. Here were folk of various ages and appearance, but by far the great majority were youngsters. What better method of reaching minds than through rhythm and melody? Nevertheless what was the best that could be offered? The present cacophony was one option, a bombastic mix of leaden instrumentation and trite lyrics. Did the junk gurus call this 'rap'? If he'd been convinced that they were familiar with the twelve notes of an octave, let alone the alphabet, he would suggest they add a C to this! But again he was abasing himself. Just then he heard his name called out.

He turned to address the main block of the outlet. The voice had been familiar somehow, though altered disturbingly. Had it been deeper, louder? If only he could think above all this racket! But then the chorus was repeated and he realised.

"He wa' a gip upper stiff, an' we giva 'im lip,
"An' the glue in our 'eads'll never letta it slip:
"All that chalk, we w' bored, an' just wannid to go,
"But Master would n' let us, that's Mister Barlow!"

Immediately the ache in his joints exacerbated; medication was mute to allay what stress might swiftly induce. He sensed his mood darken considerably. Surely this was a coincidence. Barging aside several ignorant teenagers he'd reached the pay point before he could reason any further. There a grinning sales assistant, his future presumably as blank as his face, nodded youthfully, that is without politeness.

"Excuse me, could you tell what music you have playing?"

The anti-school chant had ended to be replaced by a similarly angry go at parents. Well Barlow couldn't argue with that, yet he'd overcome so much and tried hard; the kids today didn't know they were born.

"Radical West," he was told by just such a moral lightweight. "It's his new album. Do you wanna buy it? It's not doing as well as his first, but since he's from Bradford I guess we all ought to help him out."

He felt his old limbs start to shake. Richard Weston, he knew at once, and then gripped the counter for stability. "Give me a copy."

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The demand was complied with, Barlow paid on his savings account plastic, the shop fell away like a bad memory. Once he'd driven his little car home, almost without reflection, he hurried inside, the better to pour a large scotch and feed the CD into his stereo, the one source of media, save for his computer, he cared to own. The noise trampled forth.

Amid numerous unsubtly titled songs - 'Cocaine', 'Addicted to Rehab', 'Road Ram-page' - was the one that mattered to him: 'Mister Barlow'. He tracked forward and was dismayed to hear just the same senseless diatribe, its vitriol potent and personal. Could he be certain that he were the target? He crossed the lounge to his PC desk and activated the system. As the Internet link was achieved, the drink sloshed in his glass and then his belly. A quick search revealed an official website; his brain performed a savage jolt.

Radical West had been born Richard Weston in Bradford, 1980. He'd grown up on a council estate, showing little interest in school despite an undoubted talent as a rock musician. The artist had stated, 'I hated my childhood. I was bullied, remained largely friendless, and wasn't encouraged to do the things I excelled at.' He'd compensated since by honing a distinctive brand of 'in-yer-face' rapping. He was known for his controversial onstage posturing, wielding mock weapons to the grim delight of a predominantly teenage audience. Already he'd developed, and ostensibly conquered, a significant drug habit. In short he had attitude, and adored the adulation.

A digitised photograph revealed an unhappy-looking man whose expression sent a shiver along the spine of Barlow.

His bones hurt and he took two more of his pills with neat whisky. Why had the boy - nay, man decided to attack him? Barlow's recollection of teaching was principally of altruism: striving to convey the message that everybody was somebody, that pleasure was simple and cheap, that life was indeed worth living. Had he been deluded? Nobody really cared for him, his family and friends all at one stage proving unworthy. He'd never married on account of the fact that the 'right

person' was a cultural invention, a conspiracy to achieve misery and thus commitment to spending. Barlow had resisted because he'd known better. What about the less fortunate generation?

Richard Weston had been an enigmatic pupil, displaying intermittent though inarguable evidence of ability. Barlow remembered vaguely a decent poem written by the lad, yet it was in music that he'd been precocious. He hadn't adhered to the proscribed curriculum - no piano, recorder, or violin for him, rather metal containers whacked with sticks, an earnest if aggressive plea for synthesisers and electric guitars that the school had refused to provide, despite protestations from Barlow. So it was him whose face young Radical West had understood as that of uncaring authority. But that hadn't been true; as a teacher he'd grown just as disgruntled by the hegemonic world. And now this!

Barlow glanced from the website, listening as the album growled on. He didn't particularly like what the singer was producing but he'd always been liberal enough to afford individuals opportunity. He'd felt he'd been a good teacher - this was one of the few things he clung on to about his dissatisfactory life - yet here was a voice claiming otherwise. What a crap place, the modern social situation. So cruel, rife with injustice. He flicked off the rant about himself and set loose another entitled 'How To Buy A Gun', apparently a guide that enabled fans to arm up on the black market, however abstruse the instructions:

"Take a tome from the church, an'
evade the police,

"The black dog exchanged will find you
some peace."

Wasn't there a pub in Bradford called The Black Dog? This was also a term for depression, and 'peace' was an ambiguously sounding word, wasn't it? Why would anyone blue wish to take a religious book and swap it for a gun? Barlow could complete The Times crossword in half-an-hour, so this was easy

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fodder for him. With obfuscation Radical West had succeeded in evading censorship. The master was impressed by the pupil! As he returned to the burning monitor a small sinister grin proved irrepressible. Here was a heavy promotion: the pop star would perform in his native city this coming week. Barlow murdered the buzzing unit, the better to strip out of his respectable clothes. Tomorrow was a day for adventure, and his pain nigh on negligible he slept well for a change.

The following morning without appetite he jotted down the words of 'How To Buy A Gun'. The message appeared to be thus: display a copy of The Bible in The Black Dog on a Sunday between five and seven pm and make sure you were carrying three

hundred pounds for which you would be offered an automatic pistol with a replacement clip. Surely anyone smart would be able to deduce this, yet Barlow imagined that discounted most of Radical

West's fans! Still

what kind of a world was it that allowed such insidious advertisement? With weapons dropping into the subcultures how much worse would matters get? The drugs kicking in, he stepped across his bungalow and out to the hatchback.

On Sunday the city centre was mercifully quiet. Nevertheless after parking up without outrageous cost in a multi-storey, Barlow spotted several children spraying a stretch of wall with hissing aerosols. He didn't feel the need to prevent them; his authoritative presence (tallish, stout, dark-eyed) was enough and they fled, leaving him to appreciate their ungrammatical excesses. Dear God what a garish mess, though what did people expect? The cultural climate demanded individual achievement and when people couldn't manage this in the acceptable way they sought identity by deviant means. But everybody felt like shit. Barlow moved on to a cash dispenser and did what everyone else was doing: drew out a significant portion of his savings and went buying.

The Radical West 'broken-homecoming' concert would be held at Valley Parade football stadium on Monday evening. The tickets had been reduced from twenty pounds to fifteen because sales were poor, though some - in fact a lot - of the exclusive area at the front was still available at a full thirty. The woman in the box office was surprised when Barlow requested this pricier alternative, saying, "One young relative is going to have a fine time tomorrow! Who is it, sir - a grandchild? I know that the singer says many shocking things but I don't think the children really take him so literally. His music's just a bit of naughty fun, a passing phase."

Hmm, he'd suspected this, and to have it confirmed by someone perhaps more

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connected than he to the zeitgeist spurred him on. At an independent bookshop he bought the only copy of The Bible in stock. That this text had proved so powerfully influential was beyond belief. A popular artist might command an audience of several million, yet it was all ephemera, the message forgotten as 'devotees' then bought into another quick fix of relief while the rotten planet went on turning, the exploiter exploiting, the puppets they controlled gazing into their increasingly unreal navels. At least Radical West was having a go at the social sphere, however wrong he'd got it. Barlow carried the book in clenched hands and made his way inexorably for the dire suburbs.

There was indeed a church at the brow of the lane that overlooked The Black Dog. It was approaching dinnertime and his limbs burned; to take another shot of his medication he'd need a drink and maybe some food. He paced inside the sullied exterior and found himself in a squat beer lounge, just two other guests - youngish chaps, of brutal demeanour - smoking at the bar behind half-dead pints. Might one of these be...? But Barlow selected a grubby chair behind a table in one corner and consulting a menu briefly, replied to the scowl of the suddenly appearing landlord. "Large scotch and a cheese sandwich. Easy on the ice and salad."

The comment elicited laughter from the standing duo and Barlow grew a little more comfortable. Frankly this was ludicrous; the notion that directions would be offered to buy a firearm on a nationally distributed product - well the authorities protected us from things like that, didn't they? Nevertheless he checked his watch - five pm - before removing the dangerous tome from its inadequate paper sheathe.

Just then the door arced open and another man slid in.

He was about Barlow's age, though tall and angular, dressed entirely in black. He possessed sharp green eyes behind wire rim spectacles. His hands were floating in the dark, white ghostly things that were empty yet might produce an object like magic if the request was right. As the narrowed gaze fell upon the volume that Barlow

was setting on the tabletop it appeared that the conjurer would oblige. The short and a plate were produced at the bar hatch and the newcomer seized the opportunity.

"I'll take those," he announced in a calm quiet voice, and did.

The shadow drifting towards him, Barlow had his hand in a pocket for the money. The slim guy sat opposite, all billowing fabric and bleached flesh.

He pushed across the refreshments and raised a palm.

"All in with the deal. We old duffers need protection. Lotsa little shits around. Under the table."

Immediately he sensed an object pressed against his left inner thigh. Understanding intuitively he plucked the pre-divided wad of three hundred pounds from his wallet and handed this over unseen beneath the wood. A paper packet and the notes were exchanged, his half of the deal rustling rather more than the price.

"No receipt?" What the hell. Since his arthritis grew intolerable he'd been feeling reckless. "Guarantee?"

The other chap smiled, secreting the cash presumably in his special place. "Only this one: I'm upstairs now while you dine, an' if the sum ain't right there'll be, ahem, a certain degree of unpleasantness. I've also an unimpeachable memory for faces, so whatever you are - I'm trusting, a legitimate customer - I'll remember and use that tiny terror or one like it on the space between your eyes. Comprenez? Keep reading the Good Book. Ta-ra."

"Go ahead," Barlow replied sub-audibly as the man tapped the cover of The Bible with one gun-barrel forefinger and then burst upright and away. "Do me a favour."

But as he tucked into the food with the spirit-strengthening quantity of whisky he realised his work had just begun. He also discovered that he didn't require any of his tablets; all the better - there would be more available for later.

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The drive home was burdened by nostalgia. He'd been beaten by his father, an outwardly respectable headmaster who'd invested much hope - if little love - in his only child. Still young Barlow had understood the stern intention; perhaps the short shock of discipline was the only message kids would acknowledge. Something must be done and quick. Latter-day youngsters, immune from any genuine form of punishment, were running riot. Yet none of them were listening - to anybody. It took more than words to make a point. The gun cracking against his thumping heart, Barlow stepped in to bed.

Did he even know how to fire the thing? That Monday after a light lunch of nothing remarkable he shut himself up in the attic and examined the weapon. It was the size of his hand and surprisingly weighty, cold and rough against his skin. He inserted one of two clips in the stunted handle before pointing the ensemble at a box of reports from his teaching days. Pow, pow, he imagined, recalling the pupils, and one specifically, years ago. You can't strike a match on butter, he thought and was pleased with that; he was good for something yet. Without unnecessary hesitation he packed away his gear and went to wait in the lounge until it was time to leave. To get himself in the mood he played Radical West, squirming at the bit about him.

The car delivered him reliably and early to the environs of Valley Parade. He'd intended to avoid the juvenile crowd and largely he succeeded, though a group of adolescents at the gates giggled and whispered comments of which one was almost certainly 'old fart'. Hey, reeeally radical, cherubs - did your rapping mentor teach you that? Bring down the government, eh? But Barlow said nothing, rather entered the proximity of somebody prepubescent in the queue, and relinquishing his ticket shuffled through the turnstile without attracting curiosity. He was a granddad treating his off-offspring; who in security (two beef-brains were frisking the arrivals at random, presumably in a hunt for beer or pot) would suspect such a genial open-minded has-been? When he moved away from his unwitting stooge he scrutinised the site.

The stage was a gothic cave, a glossy arsenal full of imitation equipment: Hollywood does psychopathy. He wondered to what extent Richard Weston's vision, so palpably bleak in his writing, had seen its surface diluted. The artist would be backstage now, a crazy hive of doorways and temporary erections that shouldn't be difficult to penetrate. But first Barlow required the lavatory. He struck off across the moist grass - late autumn had always muddled his attitude - and slipped between a burger trailer and a popcorn cart to access a portakabin whose steps caused the lump at his breast to focus his intention. Too early to be occupied by anybody other than a skinny lad up to no good (who imagining Barlow to be management beat a hasty retreat) he nevertheless locked himself inside a cubicle, the better to prepare.

The haphazard belt of security at the entrance would be tighter around the central attraction. Barlow dropped his decent old trousers and produced his penis from purposefully tight underpants. He urinated gently into the bowl, being careful not to expend his bladder entirely; when he was nearly done he pinched his foreskin with one hand, and with the other removed the wrapped

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gun from his jacket. Once naked the weapon went inside the Y-fronts, clamped by his meaty buttocks. Tugging up his trousers he was able to direct a dribble of piss into the crutch of the material, spread it about. Re-buttoning his waistband secured the whole of it and he flushed the toilet to celebrate. As he returned for the imminent concert he endured the damp chill under his groin, just a sad aging wreck who couldn't even walk properly. However he was smiling as everyone else appeared to be, looking forward to the event.

The night had drawn in and the unspeakable mass had gathered. The performance was due to open at eight (the warm-up band was magnificently atrocious) and as far as Barlow's worn eyes could ascertain there was plenty of unfilled space, particularly where he'd settled at the front. He could be a stone's throw - ho, a gunshot from the singer! Yet he wanted more than that. His reflection was interrupted by the movement of a bunch of boys and girls, conversing quite unselfconsciously.

"He's good but not as good as what Chief Hoodwinker is."

"Yeah, but Radical West was there first, like. I love 'Mister Barlow' - it's gotta good beat."

"That's what all teachers deserve!"

As long as he remained near a double door beside the stage he would be taken as a member of staff. Despite what he'd heard - indeed because of it - he sensed a demoniac grin spreading as the world grew silent. The treacherous superstar who soon wouldn't be anything of the sort was about to be announced.

The 'amped-up' voice (Jesus, he hated disposable language the way he loathed the society that produced it) shrilled into the starless sky: "Lock your doors an' windows, people; check you're alone in da house. There's a psycho loose in the city an' he's rockin' for you, you, you, you, you..."

This uninventive repetition was subsumed within a roar of the collective fan base, by no means as overwhelming as it might have been. As a flare went up and exploded, illuminating the ground like a floodlight, Barlow deduced that

approximately half the stadium was empty. What with his propensity to gloom - the depression, the drugs, the rehabilitation - Richard Weston would see it this way too, and so for quite different reasons would his record company. Not that this should inhibit his act. He was stalking before his adherents now.

He was dressed in denim and a horror mask, grappling with the frame of a crossbow whose bolt had been primed yet also probably screwed to the wood. Whenever he aimed at the diminished throng a screeching cheer went up that struck Barlow as suicidal. But this was all theatre. A series of increasingly absurd rifles worked through while the music (such as this might be described) swelled, the man strutted forward to a microphone stand, snatched the phallic tool from the tension of its maw, and then began to sing, rap, bleat - whatever word was the best to account for the din. Radical West had opened with 'Road Rampage'.

Once this charming fable about a meathead who'd taken a battery-powered drill to another motorist during rush hour was finished, the artist stopped to talk to his brethren.

"Watch out in the world, everybody: there's poison seeping into our minds. They pour it in when we don't realise; sends us all crazy!"

The pupil had turned teacher and Barlow addressed his classroom. Not surprisingly nobody appeared to be paying much attention. The food stalls were amassed with hungry children preparing to dance to the tunes they enjoyed; the lyrics were just so much strangeness, yet their favourite might be forgiven this since he wrote catchy verses! Knowing he must get on, the singer broke into 'Red Violent Sunset', a contagious melody that compromised an horrendous tale of a woman in search of a vampire, who carved herself open in the company of every evening lover she desperately seduced. Most of the kids sung along to the chorus, laughing.

"She feels dead all the time, an' the only solution / Is to become an undead an' avoid the pollution."

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This was so clearly a statement about the mortifying effects of the modern condition that only those already 'infected' could miss the point. Clapping along happily, there were around 10,000 such individuals behind Barlow. And so young! Four more songs of similar intention stomped by with just the same response: effete, pleasing, forgettable. He felt his body thrum, the gun bite into his flesh. How much more of this could he take? That was when the fading star started on 'Mister Barlow'.

Now he appeared to have won his audience. Among the heaving sea of heads there was a discernible development of bitterness, presumably because here was an experience of which most were cognisant. A wave crashed on, crushing Barlow against the entrance backstage. All he could see of Radical West, almost side on, was the wide snarl of his mouth spitting out the words - "...He wa' a gip upper stiff, an' we giva 'im lip...All that chalk, we w' bored, an' just wannid to go..." - and perhaps it was foolhardy prejudice that had him believing the performer was relishing this attack above what had gone, that his anger here was more in earnest. But then Barlow's better judgment was robbed altogether. One of the infantile group around him had spoken.

"Ugh! Dirty old man! Stinks o' piss!"

There was a clamour of disgusted youngsters swinging away to such a degree that he was thrown backward through the hard flapping doors. Maybe the latch had been bolted and the strength of the motion had broken the chamber; whatever the case Barlow was able to pick himself off the floor - in fact the grass of the football pitch covered by a makeshift corridor - and stalk along the passage to a small set of steps beneath another entrance, this one certainly locked. It was where he must be at his most ingenious.

As he knocked he heard the muffled bellowing call of the voiceover back outside: "Check it, everybody - da man is gonna take a twenty minute break an' then come back wicked! Burgers and popcorn and soft drinks available nearby, right? Merchandise awesome - get it while it lasts! Hey!"

Barlow barely suppressed that familiar reckless grin as the door jerked open immediately.

A guy stood there, on a section of the wooden platform. He was fat and frightening-looking, though there didn't appear to be much savvy in his lazy gaze. It would be easy to slip past him; Barlow might touch on the fact that an oldie surely wouldn't attend a teenage concert. He spoke with unquestionable conviction.

"Some of the little fuckers tried to break in down there but I've fixed it now."

"Huh?" Right: he was none too bright at all. "Who are you?"

"Valley Parade staff. Erm, shouldn't I be asking you that question? Never seen you around here and I should know. Been working at the club thirty-five years."

The chap actually appeared respectful, apologetic! "Oh I'm on Are Double You's payroll. In security; he has his own squad."

"Then tonight, my friend, we play for the same team! Lemme in, will you? I'm desperate for a leak."

Perhaps the man could smell that, yet he gave nothing away as he lumbered

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back. Barlow followed and found himself along another corridor, this one backing on to several rooms whose entrances hung ajar save for one. That was to the left, in the direction of the stage, and was manned by a huge ugly guard with gold glittering upon his fingers against a khaki sequence of combat gear. Had Radical West just entered behind? It seemed likely; suddenly a troubled man emerged through the doorway, his tight leather jacket indicating ROADIE. So matters were not good with Richard Weston. Swell, thought Barlow; mighty fine.

The dense guy had moved away, evidently to attend to something that was amiss in the grim world of 'Are Double-You'. Now Barlow was free to waddle along the synthetic flooring, approach the last obstruction between teacher and pupil, pupil and teacher, it no longer mattered who was playing which role. The metal weapon was ice in a pool of slick sweat; his heart had begun to pump gallons.

"Who - what do you want? What business have you here?"

Just as he'd suspected: security was apt to be stringent nearer the employer. Barlow hoisted his arms, maintaining eye contact. He meant no trouble whatsoever. "I'm here to see Richard," he said, the first stage of his plot steadily underway.

"Richard? Who the fuck's Richard? Now leave while you still can without help."

"Richard Weston. Are Double-You. Radical West. Tell him - " He paused for effect, smiling broadly. The recorded music, roaring forth while the support band set up for a second short burst, was the last track performed in the first half of the concert. "Tell him it's Mister Barlow."

"What are you, some kind of nu - "

"No, my friend, it really is me. Your boss schooled in Bradford, wrote a song about it, and I'm the eponymous villain! Go ask him if you don't believe me."

The minder ceased his blundering movement towards him and glared on suspiciously. Nevertheless he was prepared to retreat a pace to the shut up room and give a gentle knock that appeared incongruous to his cumbersome hulk. At

once a voice shot back.

"What? Fuck's sake!"

"Are Double-You? Hey, man, it's Joely. Got a fella out here sez he knows ya. Er, and that you know 'im, too."

"Well I ain't getting up. Is he important? Rob him of his name an' sell it to me, will ya?"

"Sez he's called Barlow. Sez you wrote your song about him after going to school in this tinpot turd-hole."

A lengthy hesitation, followed by: "Old boy? Plumpish? Dark eyes?"

The big guy glanced again at the aged out-of-shape visitor. "Yep."

"Shit. Shee-ee-it."

There was another pause accompanied by a clattering of some object before the pop star went on. "Do your usual frotting an' show 'im in. This should cheer me up!"

Was the cod American-speak a desire among each of them to be somebody he was not? That proved consistent with Barlow's intuition, yet he must reserve such fineries for when he was inside. Just then the gargantuan was coming at him.

"Okay, granddad: against the wall. Spread 'em."

How cliché d! A comment borne of far too much US television. Nevertheless Barlow acceded. Fat slabs of grisly meat that were hands bearing knuckledusters went to work on his torso (the spare clip in the inside pocket of his shirt would feel like a packet of good ole gum!). Immediately his assailant was crouching, putting his head close to the rear. Hips and then inner curves were probed, but when the inspection reached the thighs his body was suddenly relinquished. The examiner ducked away, blowing out of his nose. When Barlow turned to consult him, the steel twisting under his clothing, much of that grin had been resurrected.

"Everything okay?"

"Well I wish I could say you were clean, but - jeez!" The reply was stifled by a cupped palm.

"You'll be my age one day."

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The door was opened, the guard shuffled to one side. "He's harmless, sir. Just plug your nostrils."

A muted response: "Huh?"

But then Barlow stepped forward, the gun adding decrepitude to his gait, and entering the chamber of his self-proclaimed enemy, sealed them both within.

The dressing room was nothing more than a narrow oblong with a stretch of table to the right beneath a lengthy mirror and a single swivel chair. There was a drawer in front of where Radical West was seated, and the flat wooden top was empty save for a slice of plastic like a credit card and a single speaker wired to whatever sound network existed beyond the wall. The man himself was slouching, his baggy denims underscored by thick-heeled trainers. A T-shirt bearing the legend TWO LEGS BAD was a stark red against the bottle blond of his cropped spiky hair. He appeared happy at any rate, unlike the moody promotional pose on his website. His broad fragile eyes might have belonged to the child Barlow had taught, yet the harsh facts of his hellish existence had claimed the face. As whatever he'd just ingested began its work on his sickly frame Richard Weston leapt up and came at him with a cold scowl.

"So, you're still alive then?"

The singer had halted an arm's reach from Barlow, close enough to detect the wry smirk that he couldn't control. The comment had struck him as particularly ironic and he adjusted his inhibited posture slightly before answering, "Any reason why I shouldn't be?"

"Old cunt like you? Sure, a hundred. But what really surprises me is why no fucker never put you on the slab at that school of ours."

"Ever."

"What?"

"You made a grammatical error. It ought to have been 'why no fucker ever' rather than 'never'."

The younger man appeared astonished, his pupils dilated to black cores within frantic pools of blue. Barlow could see what sexually blossoming girls, adolescent lads in search of a model, could see in him, yet hard substances were knocking the sheen off his looks. In another few years he'd struggle to pass for twenty-something, let alone command a teenage following. Perhaps parents would disapprove now if they could hear him backstage.

"Who gives a fuck, you twat? That's what fucking bastard teachers always try preoccupy kids with: complicated detail so they can't see the big picture! As if any of that fucking matters. It doesn't, it doesn't. You all wanna look outside your fucking books and see the real misery in the world, the real causes of suffering."

"Much in the way that you do, yes?"

"Too right, man. Too fucking right."

"I agree."

"You...you do?"

Strike one; the rest would follow. Standing directly opposite the pop star,

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who had stumbled back in rage, Barlow adjusted his stance, the better to enable access to his uncomfortably tight trousers. "I've heard what you attempt to convey. I think you're making statements that are necessary."

It wasn't only the chemicals that had Radical West clutching his bony skull and declaring, "Major head-fuck! What're you trying to do to me?"

"Credit where it's due, my boy. You're an able teacher. Oh, and what a classroom you run, eh?"

The artist smiled, clearly needful of such praise, enjoying every bit of it. Nevertheless it was maybe unquenchable dissatisfaction that had him pushing a little harder. "Bigger than anything you can imagine, Mister Barlow."

The repetition of his name in the form of the song caused the gun to shift. He parted his legs a little further, sucking in his full stomach. A hand might be thrust down in moments. Yet there was more to say in advance of this.

"If only any of them were actually listening to you."

"What do you mean?" After the first hit on target Richard Weston seemed slightly circumspect. Or could it be the drug engendering insecurity? "I sold three million copies of my first album."

"But the second isn't going quite so well, is it?"

"It's...it's early days yet."

"Oh, come now, lad. I've seen the crowd outside. This gig in Bradford should be a sellout. You're fading away, and fast. It's the nature of the business."

"That's not true!"

"Oh no? And why not?"

"I'm too important, too significant."

He didn't look that way at present, rather a sniffing jittery child who had yet to learn that the great majority of the world was in fact not-me. Barlow stole in for the kill.

"The kids sing along by rote. They really don't appreciate what you're trying to tell them. This is like knowing the names of all the great

composers and never listening to any. As Sir Thomas Beecham said of the English and music: 'They may not understand it but they absolutely love the noise it makes'."

"If that's true it's because of what fucking school drills into us. It's made us deaf." There was even less humour in his concluding comment: "You're part of that, you pompous fuck."

"Was. I'm retired now."

"What difference does that make?"

"A good deal. I've been able to think about matters from a mature perspective. The system homogenizes radicals, gets them to toe the line. Like any teacher you've ended up preaching to the middling mass, a form of mental deadness so prevalent that nothing is registered except...sudden action."

He had the star's attention. He hadn't lost that knack. "Sudden action?" Richard Weston repeated, the guileless youngster he'd once been. Or maybe the cocaine or heroin or amphetamine had reached its plateau. "Such as what?"

A third voice joined the party, a crackling snarl from the speaker on the table. "Are Double-You - your five minute call. We've sold some stuff from the stalls though not as much as we'd hoped. I think you better get up here. The little bastards seem restless."

It must have been the implications of these vacuous words that distracted Radical West from the flurry of movement ahead of him. He appeared dismayed until he glanced across at his guest, and then the expression turned to shock, as if he didn't know what he should do. Yet there was always inspiration from without.

"Why don't you offer them a reprisal of 'Mister Barlow'?" said the eponymous villain, pointing a handgun directly at his creator.

Fear cut across the face of the man who had achieved national notoriety from his involvement with weapons, who had encoded in his work instructions that enabled listeners to go out and buy some protection or perhaps exactly that which others needed protecting from. Had

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he never contemplated the possibility that his 'big boy' approach might backfire? Clearly he required a little correction.

"You taught me well, son. I was an eager pupil. The Bible, The Black Dog, three hundred notes. Well now I aim to repay you."

"What...what you going to do?" Despite his palpable terror he made a fair effort of talking steadily. Good; Barlow didn't wish to work on anyone already lost. "Sh-shoot me? You'd never get away with it. I'm too f-famous. They'd be on to you at once."

"By which presumably you mean the police. Ha, suddenly he puts his trust in the society he decries. You disappoint me, Richard."

"Don't call me that!" Was it the stuff in his blood that had twisted panic into rage? "The last cunt to use that name was my dad before I kicked the fuck out of the old shit!"

"Oh this I like!" He adjusted the gun among fingers that were aching with resurgent arthritis. "You never did receive effective parenting, did you? Just as I never had any children of my own. I did what I could in my job. Don't you know that's why you remembered me? You didn't put any other teacher in a song."

"What? Eh? How do you mean?"

"You liked me, responded to me, yet could never push it any further because of the others."

"The...others?"

"The middling mass. All those pupils who would've torn you up if you'd shown any inclination towards a teacher, towards education, towards being more than they wanted you to be." With his free hand he indicated the wall - more specifically the grumbling crowd at the empty stage. "That's them out there."

The superstar looked a wreck, a crestfallen innocent who had learned a truth of which he'd been aware for a while and yet had refused to acknowledge. The hurt rushed in, stripping fear and anger, leaving despair. He staggered towards the visitor who came to meet him halfway. The gun hung tenuously between them.

"It's rotten where you are, isn't it, lad? Rest assured the situation is much the same elsewhere. You strove hard for years to get away and now you find your position to be worse than ever. The drugs work a little but that's temporary respite. You don't trust anyone to love you as you. This is the legacy of the modern condition. You know that - you've learned that - yet nobody's listening. Words are no longer enough. But fear not..."

At the pause the artist glanced up, his eyes red-rimmed from substance abuse, fury and sorrow. Then they grew large as he saw what the old man was offering, its handle back-turned, the barrel angled at the doorway out.

The gun.

"Call it a gift. Apple for the teacher maybe. Go get 'em, mate."

Radical West - nay, Richard Weston accepted the piece in ostensibly a daze. He seemed to weigh it in his palm before staring at the deliverer who had struck away to the exit, yanking it wide open. Just then that rough tone precipitated from the adjacent corner.

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“Are Double-You - they’ve started to jeer! You coming?”

Indeed he was, his latest prop held out like the genuine article. When he reached the threshold Barlow stopped him with an authoritative gesture of the arm. He spoke in a naughty school whisper.

“Record companies and their oppressive representatives. They’re using you too.” He poked around the inside pocket of his tatty jacket and produced a shiny metal item, again far too realistic for a replica. “I imagine you’re going to be busy. Here’s a spare clip.”

The young man received the item and then drifted out, closely followed by his supplier. While one went left towards the quailing row, the other went right, headed for the passage by which he’d arrived. There was nobody about, and however much his joints throbbed in acute agony, it was an easy task to stroll along the corridor to the droning pathetic gathering of fickle unknowing consumers. Oh he didn’t blame them. But something had to be done to encourage understanding. A cheer went up as he reached the gateway out: the hero - of today, at any rate - had returned onstage, doing what he did so well, pleasing by subversion in the best possible taste. Barlow left the stadium. He had no desire to witness what his work had finally achieved.

The first of the gunshots set forth screams, but by then Barlow was climbing into his car, starting the engine, driving away while the roads were wonderfully deserted. When he arrived home he changed immediately for bed and then went to retrieve his medication and the bottle of scotch from the kitchen. He would never know just what had become of his protégé, but that was as it should be. A good teacher learned as much from pupils as they might from passionate tuition. One by one he washed down all of the powerful tablets and then lay beneath his sheets as the alcohol took its grip. For once in his paltry life he slept with utter contentment.

-BQ-

Gary Fry edits Fusing Horizons, www.fusinghorizons.com/gary-fry.html

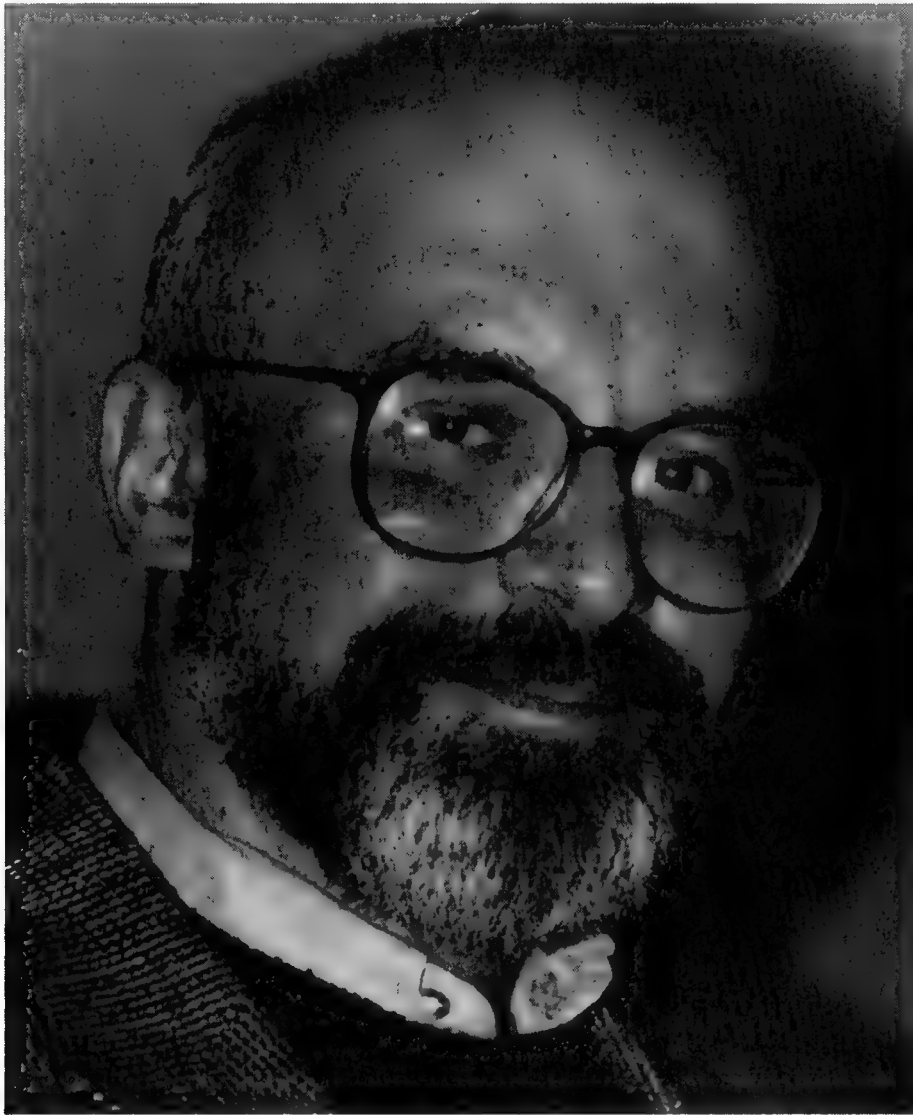
His “Both And” appears in *Gathering the Bones*, ed. by Ramsey Campbell.

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King of the Bees Ants

an interview with Stuart Gordon

by Christopher J. Jarmick



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Writer/Poet, Christopher J. Jarmick has been having long conversations and interviews with Stuart Gordon (RE-ANIMATOR) since meeting the director at a special screening of DAGON at the Grand Illusion Theater in Seattle in 2002. Gordon's KING OF THE ANTS had its world premiere at the Seattle International Film Festival on Friday June 13th, 2003. Several more conversations, emails, and interviews (expanding to include cast members of KING OF ANTS) occurred. Recently Gordon was in Seattle as a consultant to Seattle's unique Teatro ZinZanni (there's also one in San Francisco), which combines jugglers, singers, comedy, opera, jazz and performance art while people enjoy a 5 or 6-course gourmet meal. Another conversation/interview ensued in June of 2004.

The name Stuart Gordon is forever linked to the best H.P. Lovecraft film adaptation, the outrageous 1985 cult classic RE-ANIMATOR. The gory, dark comic horror film received surprisingly good reviews from Roger Ebert, Pauline Kael and many others. It was shown and won an award at the Cannes Film Festival. It seems to grow in popularity year after year and a definitive special DVD edition of the film was released by Anchor Bay in 2002. Gordon then signed a 3-picture deal with Charles Band's Empire Pictures and made DOLLS, FROM BEYOND and ROBOJOX.

Fans will probably be surprised at how diverse Stuart Gordon's career has been. Gordon's background is in theater. In Late May, Gordon accepted a special award from the Chicago Theater League as the founder of Chicago's legendary 25-year-old Organic Theater. Gordon 'discovered' and cast people like Dennis Franz, Joe Mantegna, Dennis Farina, Meshach Taylor and many others. He produced David Mamet's first play SEXUAL PERVERSITY IN CHICAGO (which later was turned into a so-so film called ABOUT LAST NIGHT). Out of his Organic Theater came Broadway's first Super Hero play, WARP and what became Los Angeles' longest running theater production BLEACHER BUMS (note; he had little to do with the botched Showtime film of the play). He has done theater adaptations of Kurt Vonnegut's SIRENS OF TITAN and Ray Bradbury's WONDERFUL ICE CREAM SUIT (which he later directed as a movie) and turned three Roald Dahl short stories into short plays.

In addition to his four H.P. Lovecraft films: RE-ANIMATOR, FROM BEYOND, CASTLE FREAK and DAGON; Gordon was also the co-writer and came within a nose bleed (literally) of directing Disney's HONEY I SHRUNK THE KIDS, he also co-wrote HONEY I BLEW UP THE KID and made a large budgeted (at the time) science fiction comedy called SPACE TRUCKERS (with Dennis Hopper and George Wendt). He's also made some engaging genre films like PIT AND THE PENDULUM (with Lance Henriksen and Oliver Reed), FORTRESS (with Christopher Lambert), and DAUGHTERS OF DARKNESS (with Anthony Perkins).

Stuart Gordon was born August 11, 1947 in Chicago. His father, who worked in a cosmetic factory making shampoo, died when Stuart was just 14. His mother then became a high-school English teacher to support the family. She was very supportive of Stuart's artistic development and encouraged him to experiment with his father's old 8-millimeter movie

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camera. Gordon and his friends made crazy short films. He still has some of them including one called MENTAL ILLNESS FOR FUN AND PROFIT. Eventually he became a theater major at the University of Wisconsin and started dealing with controversy following his arrest on an obscenity charge for his 1968 stage production of PETER PAN, which featured nudity and subversive political satire.

BRUT: Your latest film, KING OF THE ANTS is now out on DVD. It is not about giant insects, but actually the story of an amoral 20 something construction worker who decides that it's okay to kill an innocent man in cold blood.

GORDON: Or as I like to think of it, it's about a normal guy who finds something he's good at doing.

BRUT: Ah the Stuart Principle. In the film there is controversial centerpiece featuring a brutal and disturbing torture sequence that people will be talking about for a long time. How did the project come about?

GORDON: It's based on a book by Charles Higson, a British novelist who has done a lot of work on British television. He wrote the screenplay based on his book. George Wendt (Norm on CHEERS) brought it to me when we were in Ireland shooting SPACE TRUCKERS about ten years ago. He said: "If you like this as much as I do I'll option it." I read the book, thought it was incredible and George optioned the rights to the book.

BRUT: It could be described as Quentin Tarantino meets Hitchcock.

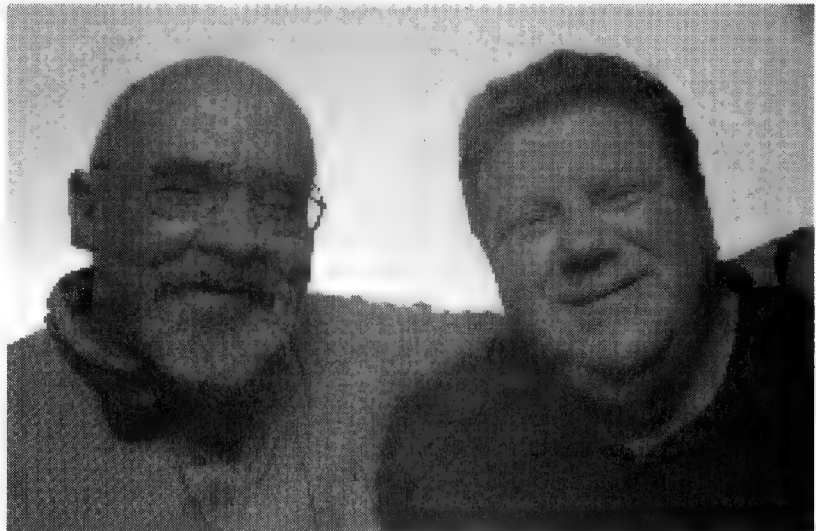
GORDON: I think in some ways it's like RESERVOIR DOGS. It is very violent, but it goes beyond that and there's no guns used in this movie. There's a lot of killing but it's done with blunt instruments and things. One guy gets killed with a refrigerator.

BRUT: Frost-free?

GORDON: That's cold.

BRUT: Sorry. So is the film pretty close to the novel?

GORDON: I think it is. It has been reset in America of course. The book was set in London. Charlie Higson did a few changes to the novel which



Stuart Gordon & George Wendt

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I think actually improved it. We got people like Daniel Baldwin, Ron Livingston, Vernon Wells and Kari Wuhrer in the film. It was shot in 6 weeks or 24 -- 14-hour days of short ends of film.

BRUT: As in ten minutes worth of film at a time?

GORDON: Sometime shorter ends than that.

BRUT: Who's your D.P. (Director of Photography, Cinematographer) on the film?

GORDON: Mac Ahlberg, he's shot I think 7 films with me now. We call him the professor. I knew nothing about movies when I directed my first film (RE-ANIMATOR) and he filled me in and help me out. Mac has shot about 75 films or so.

BRUT: You shot this in Los Angeles, right?

GORDON: All over yes. A lot of it takes place in the Valley. We did some of it in downtown L.A. on skid row. We shot a bit of it out in the desert out near Vasquez rock.

BRUT: Any difficulties on the shoot?

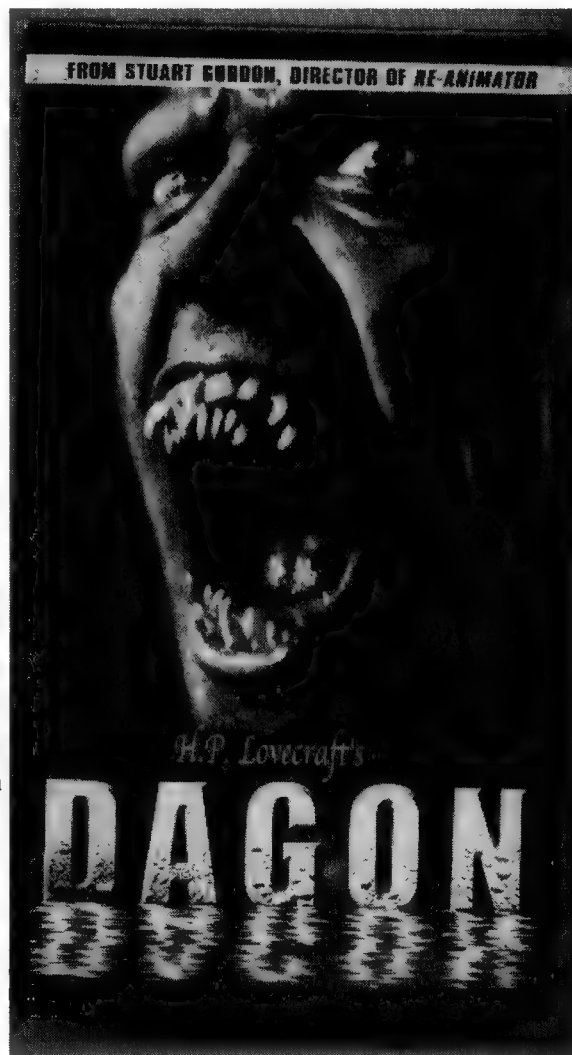
GORDON: We happened to choose the hottest week in the history of L.A. We were out in the desert shooting and the temperatures were up around 111 or 112 degrees. It was our first week of shooting and I said to the crew if you make it through this first week, you'll make it through the rest of the movie, because the first week is really kick you in the buns time. We had a lot of stunts and some effects going on out there as well.

BRUT: You went from cold and wet with DAGON on the coast of Spain to hot and dry in the Los Angeles desert.

GORDON: I did.

BRUT: Was it a fun shoot for you?

GORDON: It was fun because I was working with a lot of old friends and making new friends too. I had never worked with Kari Wuhl and Danny



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Baldwin before and that was fun. And this guy Chris McKenna who is star of the movie I think he was really fantastic and a real pleasure to work with.

(Chris McKenna was born October 18, 1977 in Queens New York. He played Joseph Francis on ONE LIFE TO LIVE 1990-1993. He made appearances on THE PRACTICE, THAT'S LIFE and TOUCHED BY AN ANGEL in 2001/2000. His other film credits are IN AND OUT and ACADEMY BOYZ 2001).

BRUT: It wasn't easy to get made I understand.

GORDON: We had a very hard time finding a company to finance it because it is so extreme. It is so dark.

BRUT: Violent and gory as well?

GORDON: It's very, very violent. And the violence is not pretty it is really grotesque. And the thing about it is, it's about a guy who is hired to kill an innocent person. Which he does and you still like the guy in the film. The script was great. I had a meeting with this guy who is a head of a big company. I gave him the script and I said, "Now once you start reading the script you aren't going to be able to put this down until you're done." So I got a call from him the next morning at about 9 o'clock. He says, "I was up all night reading your fucking script." I said, "Great," and he said, "Yeah, but we can never do this, it's too much." And that was kind of the reaction we were getting from this.

BRUT: And you started getting frustrated?

GORDON: A little. I thought about how Hitchcock basically used his own money to produce PSYCHO.

BRUT: What's the matter with them? You're Stuart Gordon. You did RE-ANIMATOR. I mean you made fish scary (DAGON) and you can't make the movies you want?

GORDON: (chuckles) Thank you for that. People are very conservative, especially when movies cost several million to make.

BRUT: So it's really difficult working within the studio system?

GORDON: Yes, they much prefer hiring new directors.

BRUT: As in an ageism thing?

GORDON: Certainly some of that but guys who are just out of film school and who have directed a couple of music videos are who get hired. Experienced directors aren't as easy to control and we also want to do new stuff. We don't want to do the same old stuff all the time and someone like that scares people. Anything that is new is scary.

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Everyone wants something to be like something else. I remember when we were in meetings talking to people about KOTA and they would ask, "Well, what other movie is it like?" It's kind of hard to say.

BRUT: Can't you bend the truth a little bit and say: "Oh it's like Alfred Hitchcock's FRENZY"?

GORDON: Well most executives are too young to even remember anything by Hitchcock. It would mean nothing to them. An old classic movie to these guys is PULP FICTION. What you have to do is compare it to something like LORD OF THE RINGS that has made them a zillion dollars. You know instead of LORD it is KING and instead of RINGS you have ANTS.

(we laugh)

You have to describe it like it's ALIEN meets JAWS. It has to be exactly like whatever made money last week. That is the way they are. Look at Disney? The movies are now based on theme park rides.. what is that? The studios do well known stories like KING ARTHUR. They like well-known titles. They take a bad TV series like STARKY AND HUTCH and make it into a silly comedy. They take STEPFORD WIVES and make that campier and funnier.

BRUT: Yeah, I remember the original S.W..

GORDON: You know William Goldman wrote the screenplay for the original S.W. and what he feels ruined it was the ending. The director, was English, Bryan Forbes—good director, but he insisted on casting his wife in the movie, Nanette Newman was her name. At the end of the book all the Stepford Wives are walking around in hot pants, halter-tops and bikinis. So at the end of the movie we see the Wives in the supermarket. But Nanette Newman was a little older and didn't look good in hot pants, so they put her and everyone else in long dresses and big hats and things. You have a compromise like that and it just takes too much away from the movie. The original movie is still fun, but it could have been better. I really got a kick out of the book by Ira Levin, which is a satire, not dark and scary like ROSEMARY'S BABY. In the book the guy creating the Stepford Wives used to work at Disney and create these Animatronic people.

BRUT: That's right, good stuff. Do you mind saying how much the budget for KING OF THE ANTS was?

GORDON: It was under a million.

BRUT: And it never got distributed into the theaters did it?

GORDON: What happened was that they started to sell it before it was even finished to Blockbuster. They were in negotiations with them when we premiered it at the Festival last year and the producers, The Asylum

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Group ended up making the deal with them. So we were hoping someone would come in and make a better offer that would blow them out of the water, because if you tie up the Home video and the DVD market that's taking too much away from potential distributors.

BRUT: You can't release it to Blockbuster un-rated though could you?

GORDON: You're right but we ended up getting an R rating without making any changes.

BRUT: Really? Even with the pretty graphic love scene?

GORDON: It was really kind of amazing. They were on the fence about the love scene for instance but they ended up saying okay we'll give you an R rating-- without a fight. I would have really liked to see it get a theatrical release. There wasn't any time to do that. Blockbuster didn't want to pay for that. It played in about 35 film festivals around the world and the response has been great. I was expecting the reviews to be split down the middle but it worked out to be about 80 / 20. I think it wound up being a very well reviewed movie. Hopefully a lot of people will see it now that it's coming out on DVD.

Chris McKenna who is in every scene in the film is a guy who really deserves a break and has a great future in front of him. I don't think he's been in anything since this film. Hopefully now people will see him in the movie and he'll get lots of work. I would like to work with Chris again and with Higson too. He's got a great gig now writing a series of James Bond books. Actually James Bond as a teenager, the Ian Fleming estate hired him to do it. I have a feeling that will end up being a movie or a franchise of movies.

BRUT: Sure Young Bond, James Bond, directed by Steven Spielberg.

GORDON: Yes, exactly.

BRUT: Any of the other interesting festival reactions?

GORDON: Funny story. There is a film festival in Brussels that is really crazy. They really love KOTA. They showed it towards the beginning of the festival and from that point on anytime someone was about to get murdered the whole audience would start yelling: "The fridge, the fridge..." so that was great!

BRUT: You don't forget that scene with the refrigerator.

GORDON: You have seen people being murdered a million different ways, but not that way. So I thought that was great that the audience was saying that.

BRUT: Does the DVD have special features?

GORDON: There's a commentary and they did a making of kind of feature.

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That's pretty short but the shoot was short—only 24 days---

BRUT: So we'll see you sweating in the desert?.

GORDON: Well it was so hot your perspiration immediately evaporated.

BRUT: I think a lot of people are going to see a unique little thriller with a brilliant career making performance from Chris McKenna.

GORDON: I'm happy with the film.

BRUT: Speaking of Ants, your younger brother David is an author....

GORDON: He writes nature books. He's been getting very popular. He's written a series of books on insects. His last book is an insect cookbook.

BRUT: Did you say an insect cookbook?

GORDON: Yeah He wrote the Eat a Bug Café Cookbook. And he's been going on all these talk shows cooking bugs for people. He got Conan O'Brien to eat a cockroach.

BRUT: Oh there you go --course it was a special gourmet cockroach right?

GORDON: Yes, it was cooked.

BRUT: Have you sampled this stuff?

GORDON: Oh sure I'm his guinea pig.

BRUT: Oh great so which one tastes like chicken?

GORDON: They actually all taste pretty. . .well some of them taste really good. The best one I ever had was ant larvae, which is a delicacy like Caviar-- I had ant larva tacos when I was in Mexico.

BRUT: You're not just the director of KOTA you're the Devourer of Ants! Does this have a unique flavor? I mean do you know it's something different you are eating?

GORDON: Well ants do have a unique flavor because they have this formic acid in them that gives them a unique tangy taste. My brother makes a very good case that physically they are very similar to lobster or shrimp, you know they are kind of like crustaceans--shells on the outside, so they are similar in taste and you fry them up in butter-- I mean what is not to like?

BRUT: There you go! Fry 'em up with some butter and garlic. I had a great interview with Stuart Gordon we talked about his brother and eating insects.

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GORDON: Oh you have to try it sometimes. My brother makes this Scorpion Scaloppini that's to die for.

BRUT: Yum. The alliteration is good too.

BRUT: I read that one of your favorite movies is William Castle's THE TINGLER with Vincent Price, correct?

GORDON: Oh yes. That movie was a source of nightmares for many years.

BRUT: How old were you when you first saw it?

GORDON: Oh I think I was 12 or 13 years old.

BRUT: Did you get to see it in a theater where Castle had rigged the seats?

(NOTE: Producer/Director William Castle attached devices to theater seats in some auditoriums showing THE TINGLER that made them vibrate and they were activated during some of the film's scary moments).

GORDON: Yeah, I got one of those rigged seats... I kind of psyched myself up for it... or psyched myself out for it maybe I got in there late. I walked in on what is the scariest scene in the whole movie. I don't know if you are familiar with it but there is a sequence where a guy is trying to scare his wife to death.

BRUT: Right.

GORDON: And so all this stuff is happening one right after another. There's like this bathtub filling up with blood and this hand coming out of the blood. I thought 'Oh my God if that was what this movie is going to be like...' And then, the seat started shaking and I was out of that theater so fast... I took my brother with me to the movie and to this day he teases me about how I ran out of the theater leaving him behind. I just took off.

BRUT: Did you ever meet William Castle?

GORDON: No never did but I was a huge fan and it was great to see him in ROSEMARY'S BABY. I like MR. SARDONICUS a lot. I'd like to do a remake of that someday. THE TINGLER I think is still a very fresh idea. I think it's kind of like Cronenberg movie in a way.

BRUT: You're right it would still make a great Cronenberg movie.

GORDON: I had never seen the whole movie until I was in Spain and they were showing the film so I thought I should see it and make it to the end of the movie. I had met Quentin Tarantino there and I was talking to him about it. He had never seen the film. I was telling him about

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the rigged seats and such. So I sat behind him in the movie and when it got to a scary part I would shake his seat.

(We are both laughing at this point.)

BRUT: You met Vincent Price right?

GORDON: I did get to meet Vincent Price. The first time was when I was still doing theater in Chicago he doing his one man show of Oscar Wilde. I got to meet him and hang out with him in his dressing room. He was a wonderful guy. Very accessible, not at all what you might think. When I was doing PIT AND THE PENDULUM I wanted to use him in that film.

BRUT: That's right. He was pretty frail though.

GORDON: Yes he was sick. I wanted him to play the Pope but we were shooting in Italy and he really wasn't well enough to do any traveling.

BRUT: Were there other people you wanted to meet? Peter Cushing? Christopher Lee? Boris Karloff?

GORDON: I wish I had the chance to meet Karloff. I did get to meet Peter Cushing, but not Christopher Lee and I did get to meet Donald Pleasance. Cushing had a real sense of humor. You know so many people think that horror movies are all junk. What some people don't realize is that they are just as difficult to do well as any other movie.

BRUT: Oh I agree. Horror and comedy are actually the most difficult kinds of films to do. You take the most risks. You have to jump off the cliff to make it work. It has to be far out... You break down RE-ANIMATOR for instance and it's just nuts.. but together it's a cult classic.

GORDON: Yeah. I mean it's very clear in a comedy whether it is working or not. If it doesn't get laughs it's not going well. In a horror film if it isn't scary it isn't working. With a drama a lot of times you keep watching and you don't have any idea if it is really any good or not. With horror and comedies it's very clear when they aren't working.

BRUT: Yes and you have to be a certain kind of person to watch them by yourself because they really need an audience dynamic to work.

GORDON: Yes, they really are made to watch with an audience. Peter Cushing, Vincent Price and I'm sure Karloff approached acting in the films very seriously and did their best work. They never just walked through these movies or phoned it in. Most of the time these people turn out to be very kind people. Isn't it funny that the more they scare us is the more that we love them?

The stories I have heard about Boris Karloff are about how kind and

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gentle a man he was. I remember one story about him that was told by Mae Clarke who was the actress playing Victor Frankenstein's fiancée in the original movie. She was very old but she told this story about when they were shooting that famous scene where she is in her wedding dress in front of her mirror and Karloff as the monster comes into her room and kills her.

Mae said she was really frightened of the make-up Karloff was wearing. You have to remember that in 1930 no one had ever seen this kind of thing before. You heard stories about women having miscarriages in the audience when they first saw the movie when they showed his face. So anyway, she was very scared, too scared to do the scene. And Karloff would say to her, "No really Mae, it's just me, It's just Boris." She would say, "I know but it's just freaking me out." And he said, "Well here is what I will do when I'm coming after you I'll wiggle my little finger like this, so you will know it is me." And then they showed the clip from the film and you can see his little finger moving like this and you know it is just a great story.

BRUT: I will have to look for that the next time I watch it.

RE-ANIMATOR. It is one of those permanently attached hyphens as in Stuart-RE-ANIMATOR- Gordon. It was your first movie, the first one out of the stable and it becomes the phenomena...

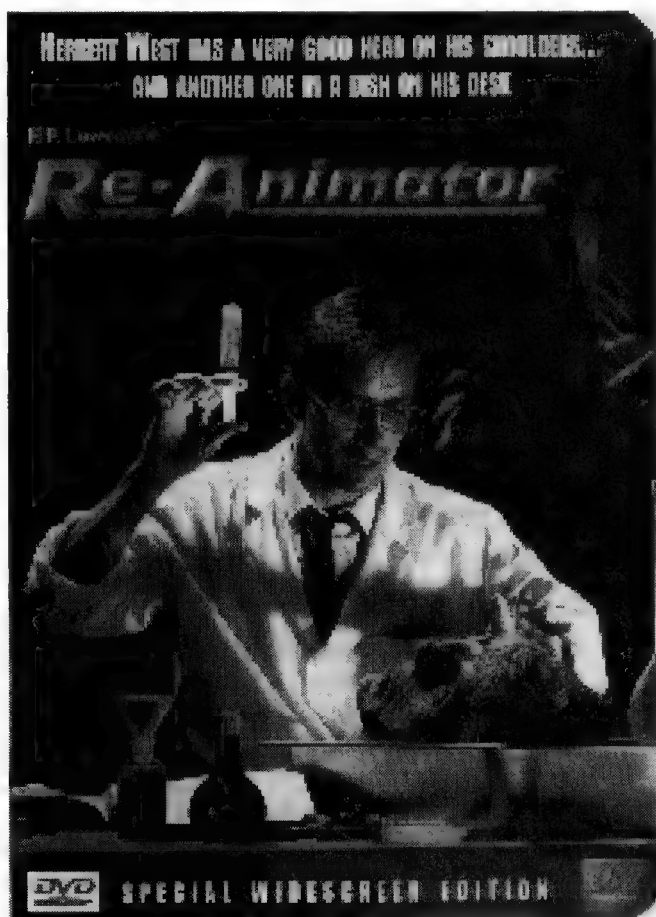
GORDON: The most amazing thing to me is that it has lasted so long. I mean even things that have been a phenomena can be sort of a flash in the pan type of things, but with RE-ANIMATOR we are getting close to twenty years since I've made the film.

BRUT: It's kind of like what happened with the original STAR TREK. I mean it was popular when it was released but it's even more popular today than when it first came out.

GORDON: Yeah, you're right about that. And that is something I never expected in my wildest dreams.

BRUT: You didn't do the sequels.

GORDON: I really wasn't that interested in directing the sequels. I mean I didn't produce it, I didn't own the project and Brian Yusna wanted to direct the sequel (BRIDE OF THE RE-ANIMATOR) so he did.



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BRUT: And last year BEYOND RE-ANIMATOR the second sequel came out.

GORDON: Yes, and I think the last part of the film is very strong and really works very well.

BRUT: Would you ever consider doing a sequel to RE-ANIMATOR?

GORDON: I am actually feeling like I would like to do another RE-ANIMATOR movie. It would be fun to get back and do something with those characters again. Bruce Abbot was not in the last film and I think it would be nice to see him come back.

BRUT: Let's see... call it OLD RE-ANIMATOR...

GORDON: Yes... exactly... Actually now that we are talking about this, the guy who was the original production designer on RE-ANIMATOR just passed away.

BRUT: Bob Burns?

GORDON: Yeah, he was the production designer on the original TEXAS CHAINSAW MASSACRE, THE HOWLING....

BRUT: HILLS HAVE EYES too.

GORDON: That's right. He was having quite a bit fun going to the Texas Chainsaw conventions and things like that. He had cancer. He had a great script we were talking about. I was hoping he would direct it. It's about Richard Speck, the guy who killed the nurses in Chicago. Very tense script. One of the reasons why they caught Speck in real life was because one of the nurses he was trying to kill hid under a bed. He killed several nurses and then I guess forgot about the one that was hiding under the bed and later she was able to identify him. Anyway the script is told from her perspective, the nurse hiding under the bed and it's really scary because you don't see all that is going on, but you know what is going on and it leaves a lot to the imagination, which really works.

BRUT: He'll be missed.

GORDON: Wonderful character.

BRUT: I think Anchor Bay did a great job on that special edition R-A DVD

GORDON: The best version yet! I couldn't believe they did it in 5.1 sound because the original wasn't even in stereo it was mono. So it's like all of a sudden you have this sound dynamic to it. They give you the original soundtrack in mono and then they do the 5.1. They threw in everything that was on the Japanese laserdisc including the commentaries

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and then new interviews and a few other things.

BRUT: Yeah Richard Band claimed he was responsible for putting the comedic elements in the film because of his music and his influence on the editing process. You knew the film had comedic moments in it, right?

GORDON: Well we did think it was funny but our job was to deliver a horror film and scare people so we would sneak some things into it but it was still a horror film. And with music, well I'm not a fan of those kinds of comedies where the music goes "boing," or "wah wah wah" and that kind of thing. When that was proposed I wasn't big on the idea and Richard wound up getting a little bit of that in there, in a very unique subtle way. The other thing with R-A is I had very little to do with the post- production of the film. I went back to Chicago and was doing theater. They were sending me things to look at but I was probably the least involved in that movie over all in terms of its post- production.

BRUT: Did you have any sense this was a movie that would really catch on with people?

GORDON: First of all I didn't think the critics would take to it at all. That really surprise me. I mean Pauline Kael really liked it, wrote about it and that was amazing to me. You can't worry about the critics, you just do what you have to do.

The fact that it was mentioned in AMERICAN BEAUTY, made a lot of people think what is this movie they are talking about? They wanted to see it.

BRUT: Yes, that famous shot where Kevin Spacey's head is in the corner of the screen . . .

GORDON: Yeah, yeah, that's right, they even said that was an homage to R-A. When the movie came out, people loved it or hated it. Now that it is still around everyone seems to love it. I think its true that if you last long enough this is what happens. "Oh yeah, of course we always loved that movie."

BRUT: How did the project come about. I hear the Lovecraft stories you based it on were out of print.

GORDON: Yes it was out of print. It was a friend who had recommended it to me.

BRUT: Now what friend would recommend that to you when you were still doing Theatre?

GORDON: Well it was actually the girl friend of my brother in law. We were talking about all these vampire movies that were being released and I said, "You know I'm really getting tired of these vampire movies someone

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should make a new FRANKENSTEIN movie." And she said, "Have you ever read HERBERT WEST: RE-ANIMATOR?" I had never heard of it. I couldn't find it and ended up at the Chicago Public Library. They had it in their

months for the... But you have to read it in the library. When they gave it to me it was this cheap pulp paperback book.

BRUT: Oh so it was in a book and not a magazine.

GO: DON'T mean it was actually in a collection of Lovecraft called DAGON AND OTHER STORIES. But that's not the story.

...this anthology but the anthology had been out of print since the late '90s or early 40s. The paper was falling apart. I mean literally crumbling and I asked if I could Xerox it. And they let me do that. So it was based on those six little stories he wrote for a magazine called HOME BREW. It was one of the only times that Lovecraft was hired to write anything. Usually he would write a story and try to sell it. This was a job where they said we wanted you to write a serial story. It was a job for hire.

BRUT: So he didn't think the stories were very good because of that right?

GO: Yeah, exactly he thought it was junk because it was just something he did for money.

BRUT: You think they are good stories?

GO: I think it's really good. Lovecraft there's a lot of action in it. And the stories are very short. All 6 stories total 35 pages long. And because of the movie, H.P. Lovecraft stories came back into print. Now you can find it in a few anthologies like HERBERT WEST RE-ANIMATOR AND OTHER STORIES.

Another interesting thing that I just found out about is that someone is making a R-A television series based on the stories. That is exactly what we started doing after I found the stories. That was our first idea. In it is a mini-series on TV. Take each of the 6 stories and do a half-hour on each one and then we expanded them into hours. It's interesting because critics who wrote about R-A said well Stuart is taking quite a few liberties with Lovecraft. But he wrote most of the stuff we shot. The stories are incredibly gory.

BRUT: He wrote the head giving heads...
IN THE YEAR 2017, ONE CORPORATION IS BUILDING A FORTRESS FOR THE ULTIMATE TAKEOVER OF YOUR MIND. Things more disturbing than... Things that were racist. He re-animates a black guy and the guy goes running around on all fours like a dog.

BRUT: Wow...

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GORDON: Yeah that we couldn't do. A naked black guy running around on all fours and he comes back with a white baby's severed arm in his mouth. But the whole thing with him carrying around the head is in there. In the book he carries it around in a black medical bag. He had a fake wax head that he wears. That's in the story.

BRUT: Putting it on the note holder spike wasn't in the stories.

GORDON: No, no no... That was actually a Brian Yuzna idea. But it worked very well. Brian was always kind of practical like that. You know .. he would say.. how does the head stand up? So we stick it on the note spike. Brian wondered how the head breathed and how the brain gets a blood supply. So we have the head in the pan and pour blood into it.

BRUT: How is Brian doing ?

GORDON: He's doing well. Just talk to him a couple of days ago. He's doing a movie called ROTWEILER. Based on a Spanish novel. A bio engineered dog. That's his next movie. He is still working with Filmex in Spain. One of his movies, called DARKNESS is supposed to come out this summer. It's supposed to be pretty good. I think Miramax is releasing it.

BRUT: So instead of releasing FAHRENHEIT 911 Miramax is releasing DARKNESS.

GORDON: Exactly. They have had it for a couple of years. I haven't seen it but I hear it is pretty good. Brian produced it. The guy who directed it did a Spanish film I saw called The NAMELESS about a cult that kidnaps a little girl and the mom that's looking for her. It's really creepy.

BRUT: So what are you working on now?

GORDON: I'm working on the Mamet thing, EDMUND. I am hoping we start shooting it at the end of the summer. It's looking like the money will come together to do it.

BRUT: Bill Macy (William H. Macy FARGO, THE COOLER) still going to be in it?

GORDON: Bill Macy and Julia Stiles and Joe Mantegna.

BRUT: Great cast and you get to work with Joe again!

GORDON: Yeah I know. Julia Stiles is terrific. It is very close to the play. People are very scared of it. I think it is his most extreme piece. Especially with the racial element in it that scares people. The N word is used a lot.

BRUT: Are you going to do a TAXI DRIVER on that... with the movie. You

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know like what they did with having Harvey Keitel play the pimp?

GORDON: Was he originally supposed to be black?

BRUT: Oh yes...and the character of Travis was very racist.

GORDON: I didn't know that. But no we aren't going to change the Mamet play. That's the problem we are having. If you change that it is not about anything. Julia Styles said she was comparing it to BOWLING FOR COLUMBINE when she said racial fear leads to all the violence and that's really what Edmond is about and I think if you take that message out you don't have much else going on.

One of my favorite lines in the play is: "Every fear hides a wish."
And, "The things we are most afraid of are the things that we really wish would happen."

BRUT: Prophetic.

GORDON: Exactly you can relate that to the whole 911 thing. You know the neo-conservatives really wanted a Pearl Harbor event... that was their wish, to have a real reason to go after the terrorists.

BRUT: I'm drueling over the prospect of being able to see this movie Stuart.

GORDON: Good, good. Maybe we can bring it up to the Seattle Film Festival next year.

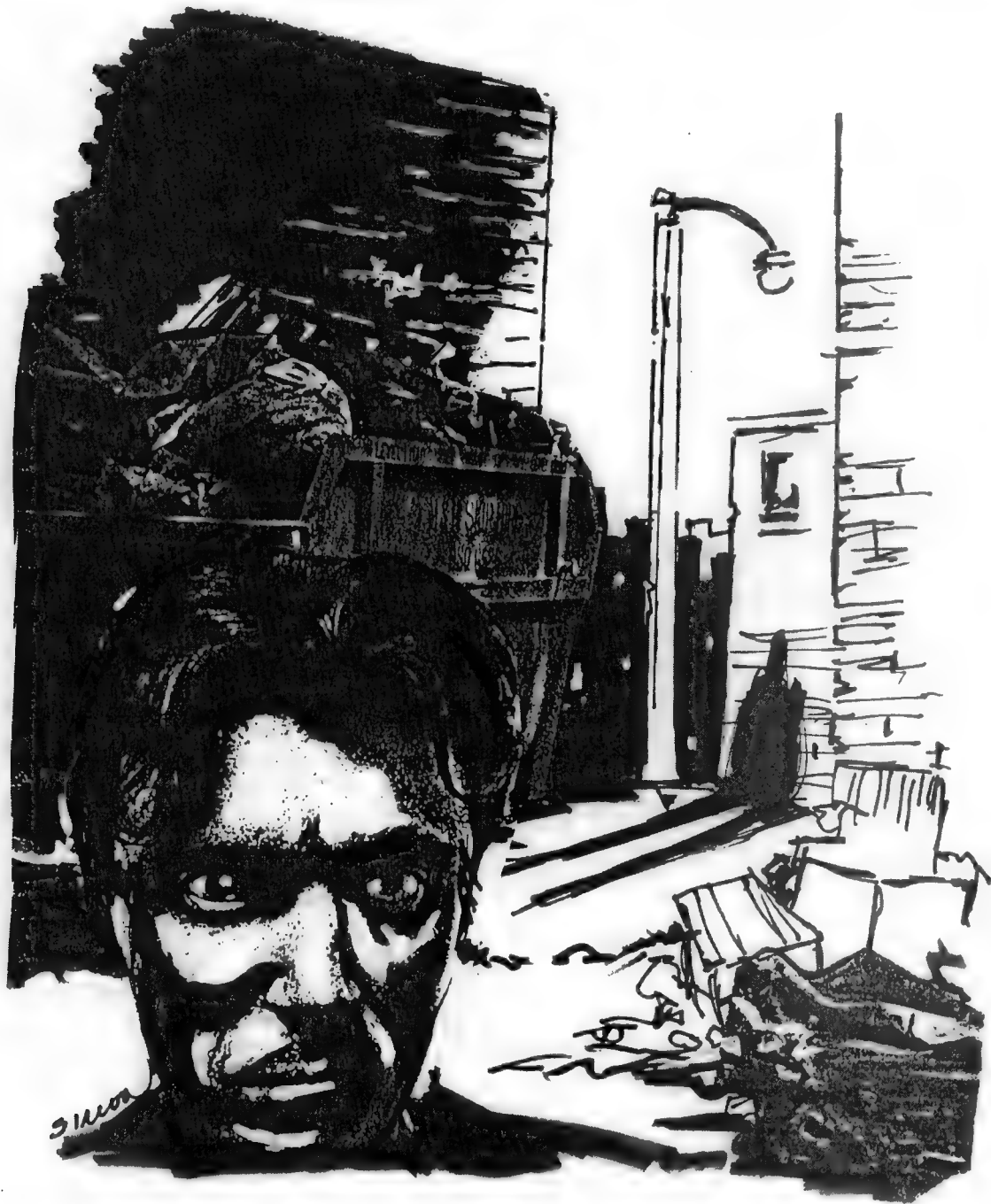
BRUT: Thank you Stuart. Wonderful to talk with you again.

Note: Stuart Gordon remains honest, candid, and outspoken every-time I speak with him. He is generous, gracious and helpful. Thank you, Stuart, it's a pleasure to be able to have these conversations with you.
--Christopher J. Jarmick

Christopher J. Jarmick is the author of THE GLASS COCOON with Serena F. Holder a critically acclaimed, steamy suspense thriller. He is also an acclaimed poet (RED HOUSE TAVERN TALES). He is the President of PEN-WASHINGTON <http://www.PENWA.ORG> and a member of the board of directors of the Washington Poets Association. For BRUTARIAN he has written articles on Doris Wishman, Ted Mikels and some of his RED HOUSE TAVERN TALE poems have appeared..

-BQ-

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Apology by Brett Alexander Savory

ILLUSTRATED BY MARGE SIMON

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for Michael Slade

They say Death comes swiftly, but today he's taking his sweet fucking time.

I've been laying here in a pool of my own blood for nearly three hours, with no end in sight. Shotgun to the gut. Hurts more than words can convey, yet here I sit beside a garbage dumpster in a dimly lit alleyway, watching rain dribble out of a nearby drainpipe.

Not that it matters, but my name is Ajay Lackré, and I did nothing to deserve this.

As much fun as bleeding to death is, I'd sure rather be elsewhere, doing something other than this. Many years ago, I came to terms with the fact that my life would essentially amount to nothing meaningful, and was pretty relaxed with the concept, all told. I mean, so what if I never invent anything that revolutionizes the way people do business. Big deal if I never write a New York Times bestseller. Who gives a rat's ass if I never get married and raise a Harvard graduate.

A blip on the radar. Time swallows us all up anyway.

I know, a defeatist attitude. Shameful. But then, I'm the one who's gutshot, aren't I.

The sky cracks and gives birth to thunder. Boom. How anticlimactic. How fucking cliché. Dying in a dark alleyway. In the rain. Beside a dumpster. With the skies unleashing hell.

Pah. Life is made up of such dreary moments.

Fuqua cornered me, ambushed me. Accused me of sleeping with his wife, of ruining his life. Maybe I did, maybe I didn't. I'm not accountable to him. Pretty bad attitude, I know, but then you aren't me, and have no idea how I ended up this way. Bitter. Callous. Uncaring. Maybe I had a hellish childhood. Maybe daddy was a belligerent alcoholic and mommy a crack-addicted gutterslut. Destined to a life of ridicule and trauma.

Who is woe? Woe is me.

Again: pah. Like I buy any of that shit.

The first trickles of blood connect with the puddle I'm sitting in. I'm completely drenched, shivering. But my life isn't slipping away like it should be. How much longer? Jesus H. You always see those war movies where some poor bugger gets shot in the stomach and he lies there cold, just wanting to close his eyes and drift off, but the guy's buddy keeps slapping his face, trying to keep him awake, 'cause he knows that if his friend goes to sleep, it'll be forever.

Well, there's no one here slapping my face. No one here to give me reason to live, tell me that.

I gotta hold on for little Timmy, who'll grow up fatherless, and for my lovely wife, who can't raise the boy on her own, so I gotta hang on, I just gotta keep awake, 'cause help's on the way, a medic will be here soon, and everything'll be okay, everything'll be sweet and rosy again, if I can just hold on, for Christ's sake.

Not here. Nothing here but falling water from a disinterested sky, a few scattered cardboard boxes, discarded soup cans, and, of course, some squeaking rats. Gotta have the rats. What's a death scene in an alleyway without rats?

So what did I have going for me? I had a job that paid well. The job itself was shit. Multinational corporation fucking the weak, sucking up to the strong. The way things get done. No pissing around with lofty morals, pointless ideals, or anything else that might make me stop to think what I'm actually doing. Just money, hand over fist. Big house, fast car, the respect of my peers.

Glorious.

But in the end, fucking street whores just doesn't cut it. Loneliness is every rich man's downfall. You want what's not yours, and you're so used to just taking it, there's not even a moment of indecision. And there shouldn't be.

I have no regrets.

Fuck the bitch I crammed up the ass, and fuck the guy I stole her from.

There is no punishment meted out after death. No heaven, no hell. Not even a limbo or purgatory. All that crap just makes it easier to make it through the day, gives people a reason to get up in the morning and face their daily allotment of bullshit.

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Nothing but silence awaits. Silence and maybe the fading memories of what you did with your life.

Same old story, I know. But I'm dying, and it's the only story I've got.

I take a deep breath, and finally things seem darker, the streetlights dimmer, the sounds more like they're underwater. I've lost feeling in one of my arms, and the other feels like a big stick of ice. I lift it, bang it against the wall at my back, try to shatter it. But it just thuds wetly, falls beside me in a muddy puddle.

The rain falls harder, and the sky rips open again with close thunder. Lightning crisps everything in my vision. Snapshots of drabness, mediocrity. Failed potential.

And even though I'm guarding against it, this, of course, is my weakest moment, so it intrudes, barrels through my crumbling wall of bitterness. Siphons off whatever small piece of humanity might be cowering somewhere deep inside me.

This thought, this fucking non-truth:

I'm sorry.

For everything.

My eyes close and I drift away, seething. Feeling betrayed by my own mind.

The sky opens up once again, but this time there's only silence. . .

Or at least I hope that's what Ajay thought when I shot him and left him to die in that alleyway.

-BQ-

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Jarboe Speaks Interview by Holly Day

Since the early '90s, the brilliant and vivacious Jarboe has been rewriting women's role in modern music. As the former co-leader of the caustic Swans and as a solo performer in her own right, Jarboe's ferocious vocal intensity on-stage has made her a force to be recognized-how many do you know can claim to have brought their own period on simply by screaming?

Conversely, her off-stage persona almost belies this on-stage force. Away from the floodlights and the costumes and the snakes, the Jarboe exhibits the cultured mannerisms that come with her southern upbringing, measured and quietly introspective in a steely, contained sort of way. Jarboe claims now that before discovering and eventually joining the Swans, she was well on the way to becoming a claustrophobic valium housewife, and after speaking with the former belle, it's not hard to imagine what that kind of life would have done to her.

BRUT: How did you get into playing music?

JARBOE: Oh, gosh. You mean originally, when I was a little kid? My father was very musically inclined, and he, I think, was frustrated because my mother was not, and neither of my brothers were. So I think when he discovered that I had an ear, that I had some response to music, he really encouraged it in me. He spent a lot of time with me, you know, sitting at his lap with the keyboard, and he would run up and play the scales and have me mimic the scales. And this was when I was little, I'm talking really little, like probably 3 or 4, when he was encouraging that. So music was really encouraged before I was probably walking that well. It was always something that was rewarded. I'm a firm believer that a little child, I think that your aptitudes and what you do in your life, it really comes down to it-in some cases, anyway, like my own-it was what you were encouraged to pursue when you were little. And for me, it was music and entertaining my parents friends when they would come over. So this was, from my earliest memories, the thing that I was supported in. And I think that that that's why I ultimately wound up going into it professionally.

BRUT: I read somewhere that your father was an FBI agent?

JARBOE: Yes. Both of my parents were in the FBI, and that's where they met. They met in the J. Edgar Hoover Building in Washington DC, down underneath the ground where they had the pistol range. They were both sharpshooters, and they were down there target practicing, and that's where they first saw each other and shortly afterwards, they started dating.

BRUT: Did you ever think about pursuing the "family business," so to say?

JARBOE: It's funny, because only as I got older did I understand how it made them the way they were and built the ideas and the values that they had and through life. When I got to the rebellious period that I went through as an adolescent, I feel like I pursued every avenue I could for alternative lifestyles. I finally began to really respect the discipline that they had mastered to pursue the line of work that they were in. I don't know. It's just interesting how life turns out. I mean, I think that I have a lot of those same kind of qualities and capabilities. I'm very analytical, and just generally kind of suspicious. I probably would have been a good agent. Another

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thing is I have people tell me I have this incredible endurance, and I always go for things that are challenging which is one of the reason why I was able to hang in being in Swans for as long as I was, and living in New York in very difficult condition in the early '80s, and I think part of that endurance thing is coming from them as well.

BRUT: Did you ever receive any unofficial FBI training growing up, like wiretapping or gun safety?

JARBOE: Well, yes, we as a family, we were all taught the safe use of weapons, guns, and we, whereas other families might be having a picnic, ours, we were out target practicing. And so I was a sharp-shooter as a kid, and I still know how to use guns, and I still know all about that stuff. It's just something that was passed on to me. It's not a sport or an activity I spend a lot of time with, but I do keep up my capability with it just because it was something that was taught to me. But yeah, we did that, if you can call that recreation, we did do that as a family growing up, and we were taught gun safety, and cleaning weapons, and how to aim, how to hold one. As a little girl, I was taught all that, taught about the kickback that comes with a pistol or a rifle and how to expect and handle both. Of course, it wasn't unusual to me, but I guess it is. Only when I got older did I realize that my other friends weren't doing that.

But you know, the wiretapping thing, I've talked about that some years ago, because in Swans, we used some of my dad's tapes. My dad had the entire, the whole house, when I was growing up, the whole house was rigged, and had wire taps in place. Whether these were intentional or unintentional, they would come on while I was talking to my friends, and I did not know, this pre-teen life-you know, you make boasts to your friends that you've done things that you haven't even done, and I didn't know that these conversations were being recorded. So there are conversations that I discovered when he died-he died in '82 after a bout of brain cancer-but after he died, I discovered all these tapes. I played some of them finally on the neat old machine that the tapes were recorded on, and gosh, the embarrassment! My father hearing boys asking me out on dates and stuff! So yeah, you know, that's another old thing about my childhood, was yeah, I probably was watched, my whole life growing up was under surveillance.

BRUT: The cool thing about it, though, is that you have

access to so much of your childhood.

JARBOE: That's right. And that's the one good thing, is that there's that documentation of my life available to me. There's a project I did called Beautiful People Ltd., and we used a tape with one of these boys I was talking to when I was a kid. I mean, there's this boy asking me out on a date, and I just sound so innocent. It's really funny. I put that conversation and others in sort of a camp version of me covering "I Feel Pretty." In a very eccentric way, it worked.

BRUT: Where did the name Jarboe come from?

JARBOE: That's a family name. It's an old family name. It was my mother's maiden name, and it became the middle name of the children. It originates from southern France, the Dijon region of France, and when the family moved over here, the spelling at the end of the name was changed. It was originally "Jarbeaux." A lot of the family went to New Orleans and went up around Virginia and Maryland, and then that's when the spelling was changed. My mother and grandmother and everyone on her side were all born in New Orleans, and of course there's a French Creole history to that city.

BRUT: You spent a lot of time in the South when you were growing up, didn't you?

JARBOE: Yes. I was bounced around because of my father's work and my mother. I spent time with different relatives. A lot of it was in New Orleans, and some of it was around Washington DC, and then some of the places were where he was located, where he was assigned for his work. And that's why I was born in a very rural part of Mississippi. He was there on assignment. My father, of course, was born and raised and educated in Chicago and was a very urbane person, and he could master these dialects and he could master changing his appearance. My early memories of those days in Mississippi, I can remember he had a full beard, and he had a pickup truck, and you would never know that he grew up on the streets of Chicago.

BRUT: Did you know that your parents were in the FBI growing up?

JARBOE: No. I knew that they had something to do with law enforcement, but that was all I really knew. One of the bad things about it was my father was gone

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for months at a time, wouldn't be home at all, so for a while I associated my father with this man that would show up with gifts. He would be gone forever, and it'd just be my mother and myself and his brothers would be off with friends, you know, it was kind of a lonely childhood. And then dad would show up, and he would always come bearing gifts. He'd show up with things that he'd picked up during his travels. So in a way, it wasn't so great, because I didn't really have a steady father figure, but also the fact that when he would show up, instead of him being there, and being in my life, it was gifts, and I've thought about that a lot, and how that must have affected me. But he had interesting assignments. One time, he was in Mexico, another time, I know he was in San Francisco, and he came back with these silk Chinese pajamas from Chinatown when I was little girl-there are photographs of me wearing this outfit around the house.

BRUT: How did moving from these smaller communities to New York affect you?

JARBOE: Well, you know, I traveled there a lot growing up for cultural reasons, you know, to go see a play and Broadway shows and dances and music, and when I finally starting talking with Michael Gira in 83, and I just went ahead and went out there and finally made the complete move in 84. It was actually a huge turning point, which I think may happen to more people now, but it was this idea where you can have many different careers and many different lives in your lifetime instead of just staying on one path, and so I was pretty radical, because my family thought I had a particular path, and that was that I was married to someone that I'd known in college, and he was pursuing his route with his corporation, and I was doing what his parents expected me to do, his family expected me to do down here, and I was trying to play that role, but I was very unhappy. It was kind of like having everything and feeling suffocated. That's the only way I can describe it. We had a condo, and had nice furniture, and all this, and I really just felt suffocated and smothered. There was still this side of me that liked unusual music and art and I didn't have anyone to share it with.

When I heard the music of Swans on college radio, it was at the same time I started to get involved this little independent art scene that people were putting out here, and so I used it as an opportunity to interview Swans, to go up there and meet them. And then I just couldn't get away from the excitement in the air of the East Village in those years. I met, that first trip, so many people that were exciting to me, people like Lydia Lunch, and a lot of the members of the No Wave movement. The neighborhood was full of art galleries and places to hear music. It was very dangerous, but there was something exciting about it, too, and it seemed like these were people in my age group that were doing something interesting with their lives, and I felt that my life was kind of closed, and decided for me. So I made this radical, incredibly impulsive decision, that when I came home that I was going to go up there and I was going to somehow join that scene. I was going to become part of that scene, I was going to do whatever it took to be taken seriously and to be involved. And I announced that to my mother and my family and they were just horrified. I didn't mean to break anyone's heart, but I couldn't be reasoned with, and I went up there, and I never came back. So I think it was just a matter to timing for me, psychologically, that there was a challenge there that I wanted to rise to and become part of.

The doors weren't open to me, magically, either-I went up there and I had to prove myself. It took about a year of doing what I call "grunt work," of being a gofer and doing work like photocopy press kits and hitting up the magazines and mailing out press kits. I did all kinds of errands. And then secretly, all that time I was learning how to use a sampling keyboard, and how to create samples, and getting ready to hopefully be invited to audition. When I was finally invited to audition, it was, like, August, and I passed the audition, and at the time, the guys voted to decide if they thought that I was worthwhile, and they voted me in, and I was thrilled. I'm so happy that I had to work as hard as I did to appreciate what I finally got to do. Other women interviewers have asked me about that, and they've thought it was just shocking that somebody, especially a young woman, would just have the nerve, and the fearlessness to just do that, and I can only describe it as a trial of fire, and you will figure out how to survive if you want something bad enough. And I say this to young people that talk to me now, if they've got some kind of burning ambition in art or music or whatever, I'll tell them, well, stop talking about it and go do it. And then there's all these excuses because they don't want to leave their comfort zone, and so I know they're not serious. Because you're going to have to leave that comfort zone. In my case, it was washing

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out of the drywall compound bucket, working three crummy jobs at one time, just to make ends meet-I did everything you can think of. At one time, I was working at a sweat shop, spray painting stencils on clothing. I just did anything I could to stay. I remember at the time, Michael Gira was painting apartments, Kim Gordon was working with Michael, they were painting inside apartments, Thurston Moore was selling ice cream on the street-we were doing everything we could possibly to do pay the rent. In those days in wasn't very much, either. But, you know, it's kind of like, you've got to sink or swim, you know, and there's this time in your life, I think, when you can do stuff like that, and you just do it. Otherwise, you know, you may have regrets. And I don't have any regrets. As hard as it was, I value every second of that time.

BRUT: Was it hard coming from a small town in the South to New York City?

JARBOE: I met a lot of resistance when I first moved there. People would meet me, hear my accent, they would find out where I was from, and then the comments would come. So it was sort of like I had to prove that I was a lot more savvy than they thought. The number one idea that I met was, oh, I'm from a country town. And I didn't consider myself coming from a country town. And I'd seen a lot. It was kind of like the idea was that I had not seen the Big City. So I just hung in there. I just kept my mouth shut about things, and as time went by, I think it was just by my behavior that people began to take me seriously. You know, when I went up there, I maintained an awareness and discipline and was always conscious of how I behaved and how I planned to behave in situations. I wasn't promiscuous, I didn't do drugs, I didn't drink, and I absolutely maintained my seriousness. So I never became one of the many musicians in that area that would be taking part of the whole social network of the bar scene and all that. I just maintained that the whole time I was there, and sort of got the reputation of being a very serious, hard-working person, and I think that had a lot to do with the respects level I eventually gained from my peers, the fact that I was female, that I was serious, that I was disciplined, and that I would show up on time, do what had to be done, do it without complaint. And that carried on the whole time. I mean, we'd go on tour, and every tour manager at the end would shake my hand to say they were really impressed. And then the main thing, too, was expecting no difference in treatment or behavior because I was a woman. Just to be able to

carry whatever I had to carry, whether it was an amp, or gear, what it was, to endure the same exact conditions as the rest of the band. That's saying a lot, and that's a lot of why I am the way I am now. So, even though I don't want the term "feminist" attached to me, it's sort of like, to me, if you're going to take a certain pathway, follow something in your life, you have to share the work load and not expect different treatment simply because you're a woman. I never did, and there's good and bad things to that. One of the bad things is that you tend to become over functioning to the point where you're just superwoman, and you have a hard time letting people do things for you, because you're just always doing things for yourself.

BRUT: And you end up collapsing one day.

JARBOE: Yeah.

BRUT: So do you think some of your experiences have led to the subject matter you write about?

JARBOE: If there's one thing that I'd consider my flaw, and of course, some people might say it's necessary to be able to be able to express emotion with the singing voice, there fore, you cannot get rid of it, or you wouldn't be able to convey emotion, and some of the experiences that I write about, if I analyze all of this, I really just put everything that's happened to me and throw it all into a giant pot and mix it around. It seems to me that my music is emotion-based, and that it's about how to deal with human emotions. Over the past few years, it seems like live performances, like the tour we did last summer, and the last shows, that they're really all about that, but the attempt is to try to get it out in the open where it's not something to be afraid of. I don't think people should run from their emotions, or run from heartbreak, or betrayal, or any of that, that you just have to let it come in to you as much as you possibly can, and that's going to take some of the power of it away. One should not be afraid of those things. Since I've started really realizing that's what my music seems to be about, you could say I've tapped into people that listen to it that derive some strength or consolation or are empowered by it, just because there's somebody addressing that. So in that way, it's more an "approach" to communication than an "approach" to music, because there is an agenda there.

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BRUT: How did the new album with Neurosis come about?

JARBOE: Well, they are friends, and we met ages ago-oh, gosh, I don't even know when we met. It was a long, long time ago at a concert, and in talking to each other, they mentioned that some of the members of the band-they're all family people and they had mentioned that they'd played Children of God, which is one of the most extreme Swans' albums, to their children to help them sleep at night-it must have just been certain songs, because I don't imagine that the whole album would be very nice for children to fall asleep to-but we kind of hit it off, because Michael and I really enjoyed what they were doing, and then they had been longtime listeners of our work. There was just this camaraderie, you know? This instant sense of connection. We kept in touch, and when we were in the same cities on tour that they happened to be in, we would see each other, and that eventually culminated in, I think it was '95, one of the offshoots opened for us-I don't know if it was Tribes, or one of the various Swans side projects, but they opened for us, and after the show, I said, "Gosh, I'd love to work with you." So it was just a dialog then, and after a while, it was just a matter of scheduling. Just mundane scheduling, figuring out when it actually sit down and write something together. But we talked back and forth for several years about wanting to do this project, and how it would work out. So that was how it all came together. It was just a sense of alignment, like the way you view things? A sense of aesthetic alignment, for me, and for them, a sense of spiritual alignment.

BRUT: So were the words and the music written together, or did they put music to your words, or vice versa?

JARBOE: Well, it was interesting. I had been thinking about this project, and I started a sketchbook, like a journal, and I had an idea of the theme I wanted to address, because I was keeping in mind things that came to me when I thought about their work, and things that were happening in my life at the time. And then they sent me some sketches, audio sketches, of what they had been playing around with. And so it worked that way. It was like I had word sketches, and they had musical sketches, and then finally, I went into a studio in Los Angeles and did vocals to music that they had sent, and then sent that back to them, and then, upon hearing what I did vocally, they added embellishments and kind of worked around the voice. So anyway, there were a few touchups and embellishments vocally and musically, and that's how it came together.

BRUT: There's a lot of religious imagery in this album, as with much of the rest of your work. Did you come from a religious household?

JARBOE: Oh, yes. I had it weird. My mother, and her family as far back as you can go, are devout Roman Catholic. So I went to a Catholic school, and communion, and all that was a big part of my childhood. My mother was very religious, while my father, in contrast to that, was, I guess I he said he was agnostic, but he seems to be very much an atheist. So they made a very unusual couple. The good thing about this, is that my father would take me aside when I would come back from Catholic classes, my father would take me aside and he would get out-and this was when I was a little kid-we would trot out Darwin's Origin of Species. My father taught me Darwin as if he was a professor, and he taught me Darwin privately, at home, and he would have charts and a blackboard. So he was making sure that I saw a different point of view than what the Bible or what my Catholic classes were teaching me. So I grew up with both points of view in my head. The interesting thing about Catholicism to me was always the ritual aspect of it, a lot of it quite morbid and quite intense. Later on in life, I discovered Tibetan Buddhist ceremonies, and it interesting to me how similar they were. So that ancient-it probably goes back to very ancient rituals, way, way, way before Christianity, and yes, the ritual aspect of it fascinated me. So yeah, I use that a lot, I use religious imagery, specifically the ideas of martyrdom, and suffering, and the pain involved in being a martyr, and I think a lot of times, for me, as a woman, women can be martyrs for men, they can be martyrs to do things they don't want to do in their lives, so yes, I do use that imagery a lot.

BRUT: I think Catholicism is fascinating, especially all the stories about great Catholics that have been lost for "decency's" sake. Like how Pope Innocent VIII spent the last two months of his life subsisting on human breast milk and getting blood transfusions from children in an attempt to cheat death. Most Catholics don't want to talk

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about that stuff, though.

JARBOE: Yes, I know! And that's what fascinating, is what you're talking about. Since Vatican II, though, which happened, what, in the '60s? That's when they tried to determine a more PC approach to religion, and that's when they changed so much, like the whole ritualistic aspect, they changed the name of some of the sacraments, they dropped the Latin and the heavy incense-all the stuff that was really great about Catholicism. The things that were so beautiful about Catholicism are now out of practice, the ancient, mysterious rituals, the ceremonies, and the history that you're talking about-all that is gone, and all of it is so beautiful.

--BQ--

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GEHENESIS BY LISA M. BRADLEY
Illustration by Matt Sesow

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They came bearing gifts.

One head apiece for the nastiest piece of tail they'd ever have.

She wasn't picky--fresh, dry, gory, clean, crushed, whole, naturally putrid or rank with formaldehyde, from the family or from the graveyard--she accepted any and all. She had only one rule, and this she clung to, as desperate men of all ages clung to her.

It had to be real.

A real human head.

A real baby head.

She collected them in a basket beside her soiled bed. When a man finally climbed the dais to stand in front of her, he would drop his offering on the tottering pile at her command, a lazy twitch of her long white finger. Eventually the pile would topple, like a pyramid of rotten fruit, and the men would have to step over mottled faces and staring skulls to get to her.

But they would.

They followed whispers of her into the desert and there they stood, heads in their hands, swapping stories about her--anything to kill the time until they found themselves at the end of the line that ended between her white thighs, like a line of overburdened ants following a honey trail. They said she was white as the snow under a hunter's moon, despite the blazing sun. They said her hair was black and gleaming as beetles' backs. They said her eyes were cold and bright as stainless steel, her breasts round and warm as a mother's. They dreamed aloud of her smooth skin glistening with pearlescent drops, of her much-coveted cunt oozing the spunk of a million other men.

No one knew if the stories were true. By the time a man came close enough to see her, he was lost, like a man caught in a fever dream. His eyes went wide and wild. He spoke as if words adhered to nothing in reality. He clasped his head to his heart and prayed to her, babbling whatever epithet came to him out of the murky, forgotten depths of his childhood--Whore of Babylon, Kali, Lilith, Lamia, Cihuateteo, Nahemah. And though the line to her dais stretched singular and orderly back to the eastern horizon, behind her the used-up men straggled like the severed threads of a torn net cast into the bloody sunset. And none ever returned for a second ride.

The line moved slowly but steadily. No one took more than five minutes--ten if he was frightened flaccid--but the closer the men got to the dais, the slower the sun or moon seemed to move in the sky. The line only stopped moving when men started stumbling over the infant heads. Then she would stand, push coyly at the chest of the man next in line, and coo, "Wait."

She would lift up her basket and, with a soiled silken sheet from her bed on the floor of the dais, she would gather up the excess baby heads like so many misshapen grapefruits. Then she would descend through a trapdoor, her gifts clutched to her nakedness. No one knew what she did down there. No one even cared. They simply waited for her to reemerge, to recline, to spread her legs and take the next awestruck man to her pale breast.

One day a man came to her clutching a burlap sack, and from the bulging sack he pulled out five heads, one after the other. She was not impressed. Men often came to her with multiple offerings, and most forgot any advantage that was supposed to confer on them by the time they stood on her dais. She inspected each head as he held it up for her appraisal. At the third, a blond, once-blue-eyed girl's, she scowled. She sat up.

"That one does not count. She was far too old, at least five."

He shrugged and pitched the rejected offering off the side of the dais. He brought two more out of the bag, tossing each onto her pile at the weary flick of her finger. They bounced and scattered the topmost heads with small, sick thuds that conjured a smile on her wet lips. She lay back on her pillows.

Seeing she was satisfied, he dropped his bag. He moved to stand between her spread legs. He unzipped his pants, pulled out his cock, and began jerking off.

"Who are you?" she demanded, studying him.

No one, but no one, objectified her--lusted for her, yes; idolized her, yes. But no man ever retained a sense of self upon looking at her. Each fell on her, broken, thoughtless, capable only of plunging his cock into her hole and spilling his soul into the same cesspool that legions of others had already sunken into. Then each dragged what was left of himself away, so the line could keep moving.

"Just a man," he said, shrugging. He kept stroking his cock, letting his eyes slide over her sticky body.

"A man."

"Like countless others," he said. He smiled a little, watching her watch him without amusement.

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Irritated, she squinted her cold eyes at him, as if to detect something she might've missed before. It was not that he was unaroused. Indeed, his cock was thick and hard, straining at a 90-degree angle from his body. But that he could stand at all, that he was not a miserable mass of desire groveling at her feet, this annoyed her immensely. She watched as, under her glare, a vermilion blood clot pulsed and grew just under the flesh of his glans.

"Oh, it's you," she said, lifting her eyes to meet his. "Miss me much?"

A gout of blood arced out of him and onto her.

"You're never gone long enough," she sneered.

His blood scalded her skin, burning a red glyph on her stomach, but she merely wiped it off with a corner of sheet.

"Aren't you going to invite me in?"

#

He didn't offer to help her with her heads, simply followed her down through the trapdoor and into her dark, underground temple. Squeaking rats ran up to her and curled around her feet like cats. She ignored them, crushing one beneath her bare foot as she carried her offerings to a long wooden table. The other rats gorged on their fallen brother.

"Impressive collection," he said, eyeing the racks upon racks of baby heads.

They stared at him, this man seemingly unaffected by their mistress, with dark, gaping eyes. The rats that nibbled on the still-fleshed skulls stared at him with red, baleful eyes.

She said nothing, only arranged the newest gifts on her table. The rats haloing her feet made no effort to scale the table, because it swarmed with scorpions.

"May I ask, why babies' heads?"

She continued arranging heads in neat rows on the table, smiling with approval when the scorpions attacked a new head en masse. She finally finished sorting and turned to face him, leaning carelessly against the table.

"First, because I was hungry. Then, because it tickled my fancy. But now, because I have a plan."

"You're never long without one."

She let the comment, praise or accusation, pass in silence. She studied him as openly as he had studied

her on the dais. It didn't seem to bother him, except that he became bored.

"So what's this plan of yours?"

"Watch."

She looked back at the scorpions. They'd zeroed in on the freshest heads, piercing whatever tender flesh remained with their poison-tipped tails. Some faces went black with venom. Some of those that still had eyes now lost them, the gelid sacks bursting as if from a power overload. Others bobbed on their ragged stumps and rolled off the table onto the carpet of curious rats. But a few began gently glowing, their dim phosphorescence competing with the brightness of her naked body in the dark. Of these, a few flickered, then guttered out, decay settling in so quickly that they crumbled to dust within seconds.

But two heads burned brighter and brighter until he had to shield his eyes. She took one head in each hand and walked past him into deeper darkness.

"Follow me."

And though he hated ever to follow her, he had to know.

#

"What are you going to do with them?"

She looked at him as if he were a fool.

"Sow the seeds of discord," she snapped.

"What else?"

She led him into a long tunnel perhaps six feet under the feet of the men who waited in line for her. It only stretched half as far to the east, but nev-

ertheless he couldn't see to the end of it. Cots lined the walls, and in those cots moaned and writhed children in various stages of completion. Some were little more than glowing heads on stalks. Others had put out entrails like feelers, and others had torsos wrapped protectively around their entrails. He saw some with nubs for limbs, and some with limbs still pushing out fingers and toes. A few had progressed to the hair and teeth stage. The oldest of these children did not glow but were snow white, like their mother. None of them was more than four years old.

"It looks like a Romanian orphanage," he said.

This time she nodded and said, "Thank you," regardless of whether he meant it as compliment or condemnation.

"What are you going to do with them?"

She looked at him as if he were a fool.

"Sow the seeds of discord," she snapped. "What else?"

"Specifics, my dear."

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She frowned at him. She stalked down the aisle, measuring the children's progress before she turned back and looked at him again. "Why should I tell you?" The tips of her breasts pointed at him like daggers.

"Because you're proud," he said bluntly. "And you have no one to share it with."

She lifted her chin defiantly. "I don't need to share."

She paused, stared down at an almost fully formed two-year-old boy. She leaned against his cot, cocking out one curved hip. Her black pubic hair glistened in the flickering phosphorescence of the children.

"I'm going to farm them out as foundlings," she finally said. "No family will be able to resist them, no matter how many children they might already have. My children are lovely and fair. They eat little and cry almost never. And, given time, they will seduce their fathers, destroy their siblings, and turn their mothers into murderers."

He smiled and approached her.

"How will you 'farm them out,' as you say? Who will help you?"

"I need no help. The oldest ones will walk as far as I tell them," she said as he came closer. "They can each carry a younger one and deposit it on a doorstep en route to their own destinations."

"But that will be so slow," he said, putting a warm hand on her waist.

"I have time," she said, and leaned into him.

"Let me help you," he breathed into her ear.

"You help me?"

"Yes, me help you," he murmured, trailing his lips over her cool throat.

"A truce? What do you want in return?"

"Just you," he panted.

She laughed, even as they slid to the floor.

"But I belong to no man."

"I am a man unlike others."

A baby across the aisle struggled into a sitting position and saw a man jerking breathlessly on top of her beautiful mother. Knowing her own future, she watched attentively. When the man groaned, spilling a bloody cream inside her mother, the baby laughed.

She had her mother's sense of humor.

#

He left carrying three infants on his back in the burlap sack he'd brought his heads in, and leading two toddlers by the hand.

"I'll be back for the next batch in three months."

"Three months," she said, watching them follow the broken men out into the sunset.

"You might want to rest up toward the end," he called over his shoulder. "I'll be hungry for you. You won't be able to walk for days."

Her toddlers looked back at her. They raised dimpled, milk-white hands to their pearly smiles and giggled.

She smiled faintly and waved them on. Then she turned her attention back to the hollow men.

Three months passed, but there was no sign of him. She slowed her screwing not a whit, continuing her steady routine as if she expected never to see him again. She stopped only to gather her gifts together and carry them down to her dark temple, where she watched her scorpions work their magic and she tended the growing children until they were strong enough to release into the world. She was aware of the broken men flocking to her children in the west, but this was all part of her plan and she paid attention only to the line of men coming from the east.

Six months passed, and the red glyph on her white stomach faded entirely away. It would take twice as long for it to fade from the growing mythology about her that was traded back and forth in the bordertown beyond the desert and among the sweaty desperate men cradling their heads in their hands. She began rejecting gifts that had been dead for more than two years. She watched placidly as sun-scorched men had breakdowns at her feet, devastated that their offerings were not acceptable, that they'd wasted months in line with heads that had been too old before they'd even heard whispers of her Highness. Then the next in line gently but firmly shoved the rejected men out of the way and the line moved again. The rejected men encircled the dais, distraught, mourning their loss. Eventually they tired; eventually they noticed the beautiful children walking westward; eventually they

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ceased their clamor and followed the children back to civilization, such as it was.

Nine months passed, and one of her plans came to fruition.

She did not recognize him, but she recognized the head he brought her, that of a flawlessly white girl-child with silky brown hair and eyes still bright and cold as stainless steel.

"Thank you, my child." She kissed its shriveled lips. "I will bring you right back and this time set you truly free."

She looked up at her sometime-enemy, sometime-lover and admired his eyes vacant but for lust, his jaw slack and his tongue slithering over his hungry mouth.

"So, you're back," she said, and reclined on her rumpled sheets.

He unzipped his pants. His cock strained toward her, a blossom of blood already pooling under its eye. He fell to his knees between her spread legs, rammed his cock inside her even as he collapsed on her cool, sticky body. He moaned helplessly and she laughed, feeling his bloody sperm fill her barren womb and scour it clean for the next worshipper.

She kicked him off with one leg and looked up at the next man. She approved the offering and let him fuck her. She laughed again, knowing he had not had the strength even to crawl away, bloody cock tucked between his legs in shame, that he was lying in a pathetic heap in one corner of the dais, watching the next man submit to her. She grew aroused and plotted the indignities to which she'd force him below, in her temple.

Gradually, over the next few years, the stream of men bearing gifts to her diminished, then dried up completely. She felt a bit nostalgic, but she was far from displeased. It meant her larger plan was working. What need had men to seek out destruction when it stalked them in their own homes?

So, she said goodbye to each gnawed baby head. She pulled the sheet over each empty cot. She sent the rats away and let the scorpions crawl back into her hair. She waited until sunset, then she had her consort burn the underground temple. Before long, a dense green smoke rose from the earth and the dais collapsed in sulfurous flames that tongued the twilight.

She threw back her bare shoulders and laughed, for she was proud. And why wouldn't she be? Creeping beside her she had the only man she truly wanted, a man, indeed, like no other. And spreading behind her were her progeny, tainting the world with endless sorrow and bloody discord.

Thus, Gehenna continued east. And her darkness met darkness until there was darkness complete.

-BQ-

Lisa M. Bradley, who just became a new mom, is a talented newcomer whose work shines with a dark brilliance. We are proud to present her debut in BQ.

Repeat after me:

**"Yes I want to save my
soul; subscribe me to BQ."**

**See page 17 for the
SECRET DETAILS**

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AUDIO DEPRIVATION

Music Reviews

By Dominick Salemi

Voodoo Rhythm Records – The Compilation (Voodoo):

It must be part of some insane marketing strategy to have a sampler record of an obscure record unit made available only to the press. However, we have been informed by the head of this Swiss company that if you claim to possess any writing skills whatsoever, you will be sent a copy of this disc gratis. That's right, just ask, and you will be mailed a copy.

So ask. You won't regret it as head honcho, Lightning Beat Man to those who want to know, has fashioned a sampler of sounds and styles so atavistic as to simply take your breath away. We won't waste your time listing the acts and describing the goings on. Just drop the guy a letter and be prepared to have the full range of American song – cabaret, rockabilly, country, garage, folk, bluegrass, jazz – assaulted with a balls-to-the-wall, off-key, high-octane approach. If you're looking for competence, look elsewhere; this is all about learning to forget what you've learned to love. (ds)

The Willy DeVille Acoustic Trio – Live In Berlin (Eagle Records):

Mr. DeVille is a fairly obscure artist. Those who know him at all, know him as the guy who composed and sang the Academy Award nominated song, "Storybook Story" from the film Princess Bride. Those who cut their teeth on the punk movement remember him as a dashing Hispanic romantic fronting a Brill-Building influenced CBGB band calling itself Mink DeVille. All kinds of rumors followed Willy, especially after he dropped out of sight and then made the news as the one who found Johnny

Thunders' dead body in New Orleans. Turns out that he's been tramping about Europe with various pick-up bands, playing his unique romantic rock stylings and assaying 50s r&b classics. This two disc set is both an excellent introduction to DeVille's work and a wonderful addition to the recorded oeuvre containing as it does, a number of interesting takes of tried and true juke joint staples. Whiskey and cigarettes have ravaged the soulful baritone but somehow, somehow, Willy makes it work for him; the bravado is replaced by a kind of world-weary understanding. Of life, of love, of the whole damn thing. He's living the stuff he's singing about and that adds an element of complexity to war horses like "Spanish Harlem" and "Let It Be Me." (ds)

Electric Frankenstein – We Will Bury You (TKO):

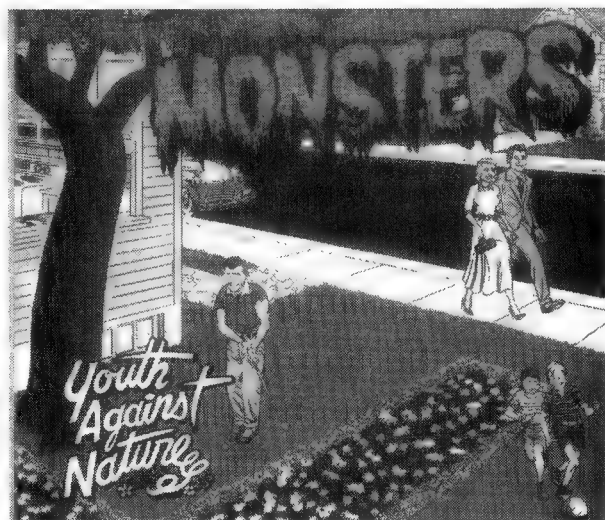
Number 372 in the a set of 704. Collect them all kids! Well, not really but in an effort to become the most recorded band of all time it sometimes seems like this incendiary and hard rockin' rock and roll unit has more stuff out there than your average Topps baseball card set. We kid, though. We kid, because we love. And we do love and as proof we can say that we have each and every one of EF's releases even though we had to knock a hole in the wall of our basement just to house it all. This generous 31-track CD has material we already have: all the cover songs from the first ten years of the band's recorded history. We're glad to have it and if you don't know much about EF then you should run out and get this as the performances are terrific and quite high-octane. While the arrangements of songs by legends (Arrowsmith,

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Motorhead, New York Dolls) are fairly faithful recreations, the take-no-prisoners approach to cuts by dinosaurs like Pink Floyd, Fleetwood Mac and Iron Maiden amuses while quickening the pulse. Best of all, perhaps, is Sal and Co.'s asking us, in so many words, to get us to give another listen to fairly obscure bands like Naked Raygun and Crime. Which we're not sure we should do because if they can make The Tubes sound good can we really trust them? (ds)

Die Hunns – Long Legs (Disaster):

Die Hunns have hitherto released three fair to middling discs of rockin' punk but Long Legs finds them moving to the head of the class. There are several reasons for this, notably the addition of Nashville Pussy bassist Core Parks, the presence of whom lends the band not only star power – Don't laugh, have you seen this gorgeous pneumatic tattooed Amazon? Truly one of the world's most unique and alluring creatures – but a lot of much-needed sex appeal. The band lets Corey take a few lead vocals and provide harmony thus adding a little color to Duane Peters' gruff and somewhat monochromatic singing. Also helping is the decision to kick off Long Legs with three great covers: The Chambers Brothers' "Time Has Come Today," The Undertones' "I Got Your Number" and Greg Sage's "Tragedy." And transmogrifying Hunns' originals "Dead Man" into P.I.L.'s "This Is Not A Love Song," and "Burn In Hell" into The Modern Lovers' "Road Runner." These transformations both occurring before an incendiary cover of The Sex Pistols' "Did You No Wrong." Which is not to say that the other original songs here are not good. They are. Duane Peters obviously decided to save his best new work for this disc rather than giving them to his mates in his other band U.S. Bombs and Die Hunns, clearly thankful, just tears the roof off things. Yet there is more, much more to be thankful for. The Corey solo on a song the name of which we forget. The Corey photos plastered all over the disc which show off her legs and chest and bum. The Corey winged tattoo on her stomach, a sublime juxtaposition which . . . (ds)



The Monsters – Youth Against Nature (Voodoo):

Critics have been looking to Sweden and combo like The Hives and Sahara Hotnights and claiming them as torchbearers for the garage rock revival, but they should be casting their eyes further south, to Switzerland, home of Beat-Man and Voodoo Rhythm Records. The Ur-rocking Monsters are the house band for the label and on this, their fourth disc, they serve up their usual heady brew of psychobilly and blues tinged atavism fermented in feedback and dementia as well as a lovely Santo and Johnny inspired instrumental, "Cosmic Belly Dance" and a hilarious bit of absurdo-funk with "Gozilla." The feral growling of Mr. Beat-Man may cause newcomers some alarm but after a spin or two of Youth Against Nature even the most jaded cynic will find him or herself charmed by the suave and soigné way the Man ignores such vocal niceties as pitch and tone. Then again, pitch and tone would more than likely get in the way when you're screaming about long-players being the most important thing in your life ("I'm A Record Junkie"), howling in self-induced delirium over the new gal in the club ("High Heels and Mini Skirt") or sepulchrally importuning a lover to "Take a Trip to My Grave."

DVD News:

This spring saw the release of the classic

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CRAMPS AT BELLEVUE, in which a very young Lux and Holly cavort with the emotionally-challenged denizens of an upstate New York mental hospital. The fun to be had in this one is Lux encouraging and then letting the members of the audience take over the mike. Filmed in shaky, grainy black and white to give the feel of an impoverished 60s horror production . . . The hardest working and rockin' unit in show biz, Nashville Pussy lays on us the incendiary KEEP ON F**CKIN' IN PARIS! Showcasing the band playing the only way they know how to play: full f**kin' throttle. Yes, 7th Wonder of the world, Corey Parks is gone, and no Ruyter doesn't get naked but she does strip down to a lovely leopard skin panty and bra number and Corey's replacement clearly can play and she too is easy on the eyes. But you're here for the music, yes? And NP clearly delivers, if you like 70s-styled hard rock with a soupcon of punk and cw thrown in. Lyrics also provided for those wishing to sing along while downing their cheap beers. . .GOTH: THE ULTIMATE COLLECTION slaps together the previously released Goth Box and Industrial Madness dvds into one

compendium. While the Goth disc has a few nice bits courtesy of Alien Sex Fiend and Lords of the New Church it's a bit long on melodramatic singing and theatrical posturing. The Industrial disc, though, is worth the purchase price as its filled with trailblazing bands like Foetus, Einsturzdende Neubauten, Throbbing Gristle and Psychic TV. Most of this is concert footage layered o'er with photo montage as opposed to videowork but the music is arresting, sometimes quite challenging and often rocks relentlessly. At 120 beats and up per minute. But don't call it disco! . . . GG ALLIN and his Murder Junkies on three shows from 1991. Shows might be the wrong word as Allin was all about full frontal assault and playing at things better left for the loo. Still, if you're wondering whether pop culture has hit rock bottom yet, wonder no more: it did. More than 13 years ago. We could only go up from here. Bonus interview with GG's mom. And who woulda thunk any woman would have the temerity to claim responsibility for such a disreputable and marginally talented lout like Mr. Allin?

Music Reviews

By John Oliver

Freddie Steady's Wild Country - Lucky 7
(Steady Boy Records)

Shakin' Apostles - Live At The Old Quarter Acoustic Café (Cabin Music)

=====

Here we have 2 recent CD releases by our old buddy Freddie Steady Krc, Austin musician extraordinaire, who, in addition to being Jerry Jeff Walker's drummer for over 20 years, has also fronted a variety of bands, most notably the Shakin' Apostles over the past 10-11 years. One of his bands in the late 80's, Freddie Steady's Wild Country, played a strange mixture of C&W, R&R, cajun music, blues, folk, etc., NOW known as "alternative country." This was, of course, before Uncle Wilco, Son Farrar, Volt, Tweedy Bennett, etc. (wasn't that the name of BQ - 80

a band at one point?) inspired No Depression magazine and made it cool to play such an amalgamation of American music genres. FS's Wild Country was clearly about 10 years ahead of its time. Lucky 7 was their only LP, recorded in England in 1987 (engineered by one Dave Goodman, he of Sex Pistols' LP fame). Steady Boy Records just reissued this gem on CD, adding 4 extra tracks. The band included the cream of English C&W players (Wes McGhee, pedal steel ace B.J.Cole, and others), and the LP featured a slew of Krc-penned originals, including the cajun-flavored "Say You'll Go," "Love You Tonight," and the one of the very best C&W/honky tonk tunes ever, "(I Hear) Neon Angels Sing" (why this hasn't been covered by a big name in C&W yet, one would wonder). Additionally,

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they cover some old classics, "You Can't Judge A Book," "Night Time," and "I Like Whiskey" (the latter may not be an old classic, but it should be!).

Of more recent vintage is Freddie's live offering from January 2004, *Live At The Old Quarter Acoustic Café* (in Galveston, Texas), an acoustic set of songs that go back about 25 years (to his days with The Explosives, his punk band best known for backing Roky Erickson for several years). While this is billed as The Shakin' Apostles, it's really Freddie and his old Explosives/Shakin' Apostles musical partner Cam King on acoustic guitars. They do over 20 songs, ranging from The Explosives to Wild Country to the Apostles...and do a damn fine job, I might add! Freddie's singing has never been better, and Cam's acoustic picking is killer. It's great to hear many of Freddie's songs done acoustic style - in my opinion, this is the way to tell if a song really cuts the mustard or not. From "A Girl Like You" (Explosives, late 70's) to "New Day" and "Jackass Hill" (from the Shakin' As' latest, *Frontier-A-Go-Go*), it's obvious Mr. Krc is a major songwriting and musical talent. Buy this if you can find it! (If you can't check out Freddie's web site, nonerds.com.)

Unknown Hinson - The Future Is Unknown (Capitol)

I don't know who this damn nut is, but this is some funny, bizarre material that deserves to be heard. The self-proclaimed "King of the Country & Western Troubadours," Mr. Hinson looks like a cross between Bela Lugosi and Conway Twitty, favoring loud Nudie suits, greasy pompadour'd hair and muttonchop sideburns, and what appear to be vampire fangs among his teeth. He plays both loud, rude rockabilly and more traditional sounding C&W, with the whackiest lyrics and subject matters - infidelity ("I Ain't Afraid Of Your Husband"), stalking women ("Foggy Windows" (which he pronounces "winders")), blow-up love dolls ("Polly Urethane"), ex-wives who've undergone sex

change operations ("Man To Man"), and assorted white-trash weirdness ("Your Man Is Gay," "I Make Faces When I Make Love," "I Cleaned Out A Room (In My Trailer For You)," "Pregnant Again," and "Rock & Roll Is Straight From Hell.") On top of this, in many of these songs, the Unknown one takes mind-blowingly creative (if not particularly appropriate to the tune) guitar solos - his playing a twisted cross between Chet Atkins, Cliff Gallup and heavy metal shredders! On his official web site, the gentleman rambles about having spent decades in prison, and how rock & roll music is communist propaganda (and how he unleashes the occasional loud solo just to let the kids know that "rawk" music is trash and any idiot can play it!) Well worth hunting down.

Roy Loney & The Longshots - Drunkard In The Think Tank (Career)

When I interviewed Roy Loney for *Brutarian* (Issue # 31) several years ago, he was searching for a label to release his 2nd full-length studio album with his Seattle band The Longshots (their earlier collaboration being *Full Grown Head*, released in 1994 on Shake Records, in addition to two live LPs (*Action Shots* in '93 and *Kick Out The Hammmmons* in '95). Thankfully, Ron Sanchez and Career Records put out this new gem this past April. If there's a better roots/rock & roll album released this year (or, for that matter, last year), somebody please send me a copy! The former Flamin' Groovies front man is in excellent form, vocally and songwriting-wise. His new songs range from poignant ballads ("Five Times A Fool" and the Ray Davies-ish "He Talks To Himself") to catchy pop tunes (the hilarious "Nobody Does It," which is getting airplay on Steve Van Zandt's syndicated *Underground Garage* show, and updated Buddy Holly-ish "Jennifer Whenever") to out and out rockers ("Steam," "One Track Mind," and "House of Games"). As usual, Mr. Loney displays impeccable taste in selecting covers - this time, John Fogarty's "You Don't Owe Me," the Chartbusters' "She's The One," and Simon

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Scott's "Move It Baby," the latter two from an import EP Roy put out in the late 90's. The band does a great job keeping up with Roy....some vicious guitar licks! Roy's never put out a bad LP in his 35 year career, and this one's no exception - an excellent addition to his recorded legacy. (NOTE: Roy also still kicks major ass live... I saw the debut of his SF band The Diletones (including ex-Phantom Mover Larry Lea and ex-Groovie and Phantom Mover James Ferrell) in late '02...if you ever have the chance to see him live, DO IT!)

Living Things - Black Skies In Broad Daylight (Universal Intl. Import)

I never would have heard of The Living Things, a punk/R&R 3 or 4 piece band (3 piece on this CD, but there were 4 of 'em live) from St. Louis, had they not been opening for Velvet Revolver on their debut American tour this past Spring. Instead of scalping my ticket for an exorbitant amount, I foolishly went to the show. Frankly, I was a lot more impressed by the openers than the headliners, a bastard mix of various ex-Guns & Roses members with junkie vocalist Scott Weiland of Stone Temple Pilots. I suspect I was the only person in the packed 9:30 Club that preferred the Living Things, who were ignored by the throng of mid-20ish-30ish youngsters who screamed their lungs out at every silly rock star pose by Slash (great look but crappy guitarist), and every time Weiland sang into the bullhorn or took more of his clothes off. The Living Things are 3 brothers (plus a new lead guitarist) named Lillian, Eve and Bosh Berlin, who affect a goth look but play songs in a 60's/70's garage bent, with obvious debts to The Ramones and Stooges. I felt they were a powerhouse live band that night. Unfortunately, their import debut CD from 2003 doesn't quite live up to their live act. Too many slow songs - the strongest cuts are their 2 singles, "Bombs Below" and "I Owe." I still like this CD better than Velvet Revolver's debut, Contraband.

NRBQ - Dummy (Edisun)

As anyone who's witnessed the 'Q in concert over the past 35 years can attest, on a good night, they're the best R&R band that ever walked the Earth. On a bad night, they're (or appear to be) a drunken, chaotic mess. Some nights, they walk a fine line and ARE these 2 extremes during the same show. At worst, they're very entertaining, especially if you've had a few. On record, however, they can be very irritating, even to their biggest fans. So much talent, and so many bizarre songs on any given album. Maybe it's just me, but it seems their albums were more consistent when they still had Big Al Anderson on guitar, before he flew the coop over 10 years ago to go to Nashville and write songs for hillbillies. His replacement Johnny Spampinato (bassist Joey's brother) is a great picker and fine singer, even if his vocals sound almost identical to his brother's. But Big Al was, in my opinion, their best songwriter, and his white soul voice was a perfect foil for Joey's - they just haven't been the same since he left. This aside...how's the latest album? I think one way to judge any recent NRBQ album is to ask yourself - "If and when another 2 disk Greatest Hits set (like Peek-A-Boo) comes out, how many songs on this CD will be considered for inclusion?" By that criterion, I'd say "Call of the Wild," maybe "I Need Love," the rocker "One Big Parking Lot," and maybe their cover of "Be My Love" (a Sammy Cahn tune that was an hit for Mario Lanza in 1949). Not a high percentage. Primarily for serious 'Q fans, and you know who you are. (Great dummies on the CD cover and in the booklet, though!)

Reigning Sound - Too Much Guitar (In The Red)

I pretty much love anything put out by the Oblivians, Compulsive Gamblers and/or any of their Memphis-based offshoot bands. The Reigning Sound, one of Greg Cartwright's (AKA Greg Oblivian) bands, have just released

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their 3rd full-length CD. This particular band of Greg's has been guilty of mellowing down the patented Oblivians' sound on their first 2 CD's.....if I had a complaint, it would have been - "not enough loud, raunchy guitar." Well, I believe they've heard me! If anything, there truly might be "too much guitar" on this one - hey, what a great name for an album! A whole passel of lo-fi, nasty-sounding originals with titles like "We Repel Each Other," and some great covers, notably Sam & Dave's "You Got Me Hummin'" and Hank Ballard's "Get It." Add Greg's very soulful (but, for the most part, drowned out) vocals, and this one's right up there with recent releases by the Tearjerkers, Cool Jerks, and other Memphis trash bands that started life as the Oblivians/Compulsive Gamblers. One of the best things I've heard in 2004 so far. (Too bad they're stuck opening for MTV darlings The Hives....although they should get some great exposure at least.)

Brian Wilson - Getting In Over My Head (Rhino)

=====

Brian Wilson's been busy slaying everyone who's seen him live with what may be the best band in the world (Wondermints, Jeffrey Foscett, members of Poi Dog Pondering, and others) over the past 4-5 years. After the initial comeback tour in '99/'00, he embarked on first doing Pet Sounds live in its entirety, then resurrected the never-released (except on seemingly hundreds of bootlegs) '67 masterpiece Smile live earlier this year in Europe. All along, he's been promising

to get back in the studio and do some new material. Well....here's the new album, and frankly, I'm still waiting for an album of new material from Mr. Wilson. The songs here fall into 4 categories - (1) Carry-overs from the aborted/un-released Sweet Insanity ('92 or '93 follow-on to Brian Wilson), and the original bootlegged versions sound better to me. (2) Carry-overs from Brian's sessions with Andy Paley in the mid 90's (also widely bootlegged) - and the only improved version is "Desert Drive" - Brian's since added lyrics. (3) Songs with guest stars - Elton John, Eric Clapton & Paul McCartney - the less said about these songs, the better ("How Could We Still Be Dancing" with Elton is at least listenable - and it's the best of the 3 songs). (4) This leaves 3 new original songs. "You've Touched Me" is a rewrite of "Little Saint Nick," "Fairy Tale" is quite tuneful and the best really new song here, but "The Waltz" is pretty schmaltzy, even for Van Dyke Parks. To these ears, "Fairy Tale" aside, the best stuff is the older songs. If you've never heard the bootlegged material, it'll be a gas hearing Carl Wilson on "Soul Searchin'" (his last recorded work), and "Don't Let Her Know She's An Angel" is top shelf Brian Wilson. What I recommend you do is skip this new release and buy some bootlegs of Brian's recent Smile European tour. I understand he's putting out a studio version of Smile later this year, so we can finally decide if it's truly a work of genius, or just self-indulgent nonsense (and the music in Smile, in my opinion, runs the gamut from one end to the other).

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Book Reviews

By Dominick Salemi

Eyesores – Eric Shade (2003) University of Georgia Press

Windfall, PA, a small empty town some-

where in the hills west of Pittsburgh. Maybe southwest. No matter, as Flannery O'Connor award winner Eric Shade has created a milieu as

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vibrant and alive as Faulkner's Yoknapatawpha and Joyce's Dublin. It's a bleak place, broken down and slowly going to seed, populated with women carrying only the residue of youth and beauty, their looks and energy betrayed by long hours of work and smoke and drink and men. Worn out by trying a bit of everything and having none of it "feel like much." So even the kids as in "Superfly" and "A Rage Forever," when drinking and making out and raising a little hell, can't tell whether they feel free or just careless. It doesn't matter in the end as there's no affirmation of any kind to be found here. These stories are about the endless little tragedies, caused by ignorance or naiveté or inherent flaws in the DNA, their rather constant reoccurrence resulting in a kind of slow death, a dropping out and dying as one character puts it. Thus, the tales are open-ended for the most part. Things should happen. They don't. They almost happen. A womanizer gets beaten-up and returns to the woman he thinks can reform him in "A Final Reunion" only to find that she doesn't trust him. A young teenager believing himself to be bonding with his stepfather in "The Last Night of the County Fair" discovers instead that the man may be vaguely psychopathic. In "Blood" a man goes hunting for deer and the man cuckholding him. He kills neither and returns home. We hear a gunshot go off as his nephew and narrator leaves him. Did the distraught uncle turn the gun on himself or merely fire in the wall. We are not told. We are not really told anything. Yet we are shown almost more than we can bear. That's the beauty of these quiet austere pieces.

Project X – Jim Shepard (2004) Knopf

It's your typical Midwestern middle school: there are athletic teams, an art department, civic projects, detention and theme dances. There's also a fairly rigid class system. On top, are the jocks of course. Followed by the Buffys, so called, because they look better than the vampire huntress of television fame. There are about seven other classes until you get to the very bottom. There you have trailer park trash. Then the

"retards and kids with missing jaws and shit."

At the very bottom, so far down you can't even see the light at the end of the tunnel, is Edwin Hanratty and his friend Flake. Edwin is rail thin with a big nose and glasses. He suffers from headaches and lately; has been crying a lot. He's brilliant, though. The same cannot be said of Flake. Flake just doesn't care and takes a certain degree of pride in it. This makes him seem a lot smarter than he is. What he is, is borderline psychotic and he's secretly at war with the world and everything in it. In fact, Flake often picks fights with 9th Graders. Whole groups of them. This is appealing to Edwin because he, like Flake, gets picked on a lot and wants it to stop.

We know where this is going; it's Columbine redux. Here, though, Shepard, with his pitch perfect ear for high school syntax, makes it real. Real and funny. Edwin is a wiseacre and Flake is so vicious and hostile with his observations and retorts that the reader cannot help but laugh. It's all going to come back to you – the bullying, the boredom, the longing for the impossible creatures you can never have, the well-meaning teachers and advisers who just don't get it.

Somewhere along the way, in this short and memorable novel, things start to go wrong. Actually, they were wrong from the beginning – it's really not that funny to defecate on a snide neighbor's picnic table or to volunteer Richard Speck when the history teacher asks for the names of some of the great personages in the 20th Century – but such is Shepard's skill as a writer that you let it slide. Because things are kind of humorous and often downright hilarious. Plus you want things to get better for Flake and Edward. But it's not going to. We know that and still can't put the damn book down. Even after Flake gets a gun. One for him and one for Edward.

7 Steps to Midnight – Richard Matheson (1993/2003) Forge

So many of Richard Matheson's novels have been made into movies – Somewhere in Time,

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What Dreams May Come, *Duel* – it's something of a wonder that this fantastical pulp novel has yet to be optioned by Hollywood. Matheson, however, while providing the reader with the breathless, pure adrenaline rush one expects from classic genre fiction, adds to our enjoyment by tinkering and playing around. With everything – the narrative, the plot, the reader's expectations – he literally takes the conventions of the suspense story and stands them on their head. And throws in elements from spy novels, Victorian ghost stories and film noir to boot. Which dovetails rather nicely with a narrative, that has as its primary concern, the nature of reality itself. It begins -although Matheson, from page one, makes us feel as if we've come in at the middle – with a mathematician, Chris Barton, a brilliant man with a photographic memory, picking up an old hitchhiker out in the Nevada desert. The old geezer is something of a philosopher and though Chris is still steaming from having come out at the top secret government installation where he works to discover his car stolen, he finds himself entering into a metaphysical conversation with the old coot. A conversation which leads to the following wager: the security of Chris' existence against the assumption that Chris knows what is real and what is unreal in his life. We're not even sure what this means but we find out shortly after Chris drops off the hitcher and pulls up in the driveway to his house. There, Chris finds not only his stolen car in his driveway but a couple living in his house, the husband of which claims to be Chris Barton. Soon some guys in dark suits toting guns show up and soon after that Chris finds himself running for his life. A run that has him criss crossing Europe running from and with all sorts of mysterious people. None of whom will tell him anything other than he's wanted, or need to be killed or protected because of his work on "the project." Chris isn't even sure what "the project" is and, moreover, he's not even sure if he's awake or dreaming. Neither is the reader but such is Matheson's skill as a storyteller that we never bother to ask ourselves just what the hell is going on. We know something

terribly intriguing is happening here and we just keep turning the pages as fast as we can until we get to the end.

The Halloween Encyclopedia – Lisa Morton (2003) McFarland

All Hallow's Eve. Trick or Treat Day. Halloween. It goes by many names, and in America, it has become a day second only to Christmas in popularity. (Probably more popular as you get to dress up, drink to excess and not have to mess with present buying, and annoying relatives.)

Despite it's near sacrosanct secular status, Halloween remains one of the world's most misunderstood holidays. Jews believe it to be a Catholic holy day (no, that's All Souls' Day); your born-again type links it to Satanism (no, that would be either Hitler's or Anton LaVey's birthday) and Republicans believe the festival to have its origins in the Gay Pride movement (no, that was Stonewall).

Fairly well read types know Halloween to have Celtic origins but other than that who really cares, right? Even fairly knowledgeable boys and girls – Goths and death metal fans – the ones that know the day was originally called Samhain would tell you that said Samhain was a Celtic God of the Dead who was worshipped on October 31st.

Well, there was no Celtic God of the Dead. Samhain, pronounced "sow-en," and loosely translated as "summer's end," is Celtic; but it is a Celtic harvest festival. What were left of the crops were harvested, sometime in late October we assume, and the livestock were brought in from the fields for the winter. The less hardy animals were slaughtered for the festival and for the winter stock.

Sounds pretty boring, doesn't it? So where do all the ghoulies and long-legged beasties come in? Death, where is thy fling?

Right here, my little misfit worshipper. Here with the Druids – Celtic priests to you – who performed sacrifices hoping to appease the Gods into giving them a mild winter. Some of these sacrifices often included human offerings,

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the most notable being the dreaded “wicker man” which we all know and love from the cult film of the same name.

The mythos surrounding all of this had very much to do with the spirits of the dead. As “summer’s end” was also the year’s end to the Celts, Samhain night pierced the veil between this world and the underworld. And so, for one night, and one night only, the dead could walk the earth. Food was left out to propitiate the nightwalkers but as many of these ghosties were of a decidedly evil turn, it was thought best to stay indoors.

Lisa Morton’s tome is chock full of interesting facts, but none more interesting than this: although the first book concerning itself solely with Halloween was published over a century ago, this is the first encyclopedic reference on the subject. Adroitly written and impressively researched, the encyclopedia draws on a myriad of works – folklore collections, Catholic and Irish histories, scholarly studies of paganism and witchcraft, newspaper accounts – to cover an impressive range of subjects many of which, like Boston’s Spooky World are of recent vintage. Entries concerning other celebrations influencing or having been influenced by Halloween are also provided as well as an appendix charting the chronology of Halloween and a brief review of how the use of the day in the arts and literature has affected the manner in which it is celebrated.

Slimetime – Steven Puchalski (Rev. Ed 2002) Headpress

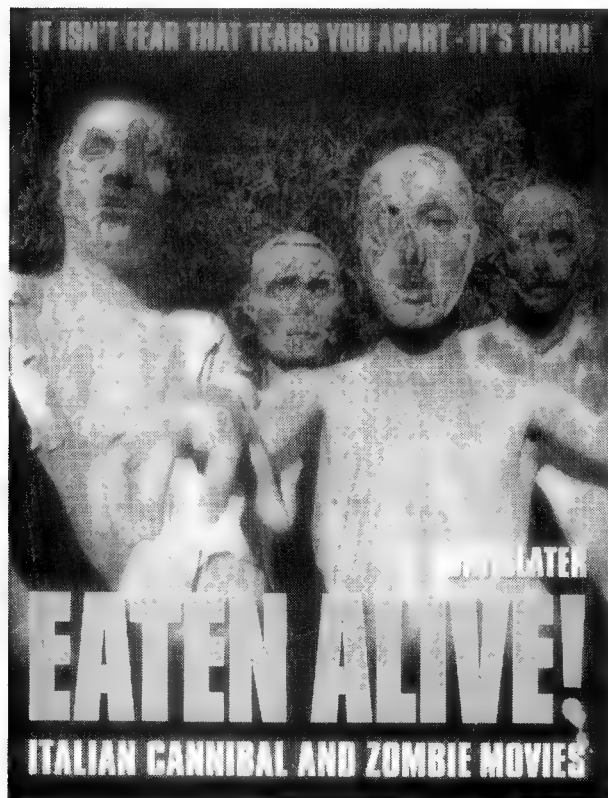
Following in the late great tradition of sleazy celebration of shoddy cinema first pioneered by the likes of Russ Morton and Rick Sullivan, comes this revised edition of critiques by the publisher and editor of the absolutely wonderful exploitation film magazine Slime-time. This is not to say that this compendium is for all tastes. Yes, madam, as Mr. Puchalski subscribes to the grindhouse school which bases its aesthetics on the three Bs: boobs, blood and bootlessness. (And their corollaries, the three Ms: mindlessness, mayhem and misanthropy.)

You’ll have to read a number of these reviews to see how the three interrelate; but roughly speaking, we’re talking about a politically incorrect sensibility geared to heterosexual males. Which is as it should be because, let’s face it, trashy, psychotronic, exploitation, drive-in, whatever appellation you append to these exercises in futility, are made for guys. Not just any guy, mind you. We’re talking cynical, crapulous alcoholics with low incomes and absolutely, positively, no future. Puchalski is the creature who walks among them: a literate, well-informed, college grad with a poet’s love of language. He’s an anomaly and in writing for this crowd, he has to walk the fine line between perfervid pandering and intelligent analysis. It’s not as easy as it looks; pick up any pop culture zine at your local Tower and you’ll quickly learn how hard it is. What passes for reviews in this cottage industry are little more than inane, semi-literate narrative recaps with liberal doses of misogyny and ranting. There’s more to films than that, even hopelessly idiotic ones like *Horror of the Blood Monsters*. There’s always a subtext, there are always themes, no matter how muddled, running through the work. Granted theme and subtext are sometimes so attenuated they’re not even worth mentioning. We’ve seen *Blood Monsters* several times now and have yet to find anything other than remarkable ineptitude; still, read Puchalski’s review and learn how it is possible, as Fritz Lang, once remarked, to learn more, much more, from an inept film than half a dozen good ones. It’s criticism celebrating and reveling in “the bad,” yet it’s also criticism shaped and informed by scholarship, refinement and perhaps, most importantly, the desire to entertain. And that’s good.

Eaten Alive – Italian Cannibal and Zombie Movies - ed. Jay Slater (2002) Plexus

While the origins of the two genres, as editor Jay Slater informs us, are quite different, Italian film studios blurred the distinction in the late 70s and early 80s by creating a “composite ghoul – a human being neither alive nor fully

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dead” with a distinct relish for the flesh of living homo sapiens. Characterizing the flesh-eating primitives in films like *Cannibal Apocalypse* and *Deep River Savages* as not quite alive may seem an exaggeration but then that’s part of the fun to be had with *Eaten Alive*: stretching credulity to the breaking point. Outrageous these films certainly are, but operatic? The only thing more leaden than the undead shuffling in Lucio Fulci’s *Zombi 2* (released stateside as *Zombie*) is the pacing. Verdi or Rossini are the last names that come to mind. There’s a cult out there paying obeisance to the film canisters containing *Porno Holocaust* and *Eaten Alive*? Maybe in England where most of the films critiqued here are still banned but certainly not in the United States. *Cannibal Holocaust* as a “brilliant response to media hypocrisy” as claimed by Troma honcho Lloyd Kaufman in his intriguing review? Watch this almost unwatchable film and remember that Mr. Kaufman has gone on record declaring he to be a more accomplished director than Ingmar Bergman. To be fair, Slater and his essayists eviscerate most of the works they cover in witty

and intelligent style (the coverage is chronological beginning with 1964’s *War of The Zombies* and *The last Man on Earth* to 1994 and Michele Soavi’s *Dellamorte Dellamore*). Nobody, however, let’s the cat out of the bag; to wit, that these exploitive shockers were made for young men (if you ever meet a woman who expresses admiration for these films, run) seeking cheap thrills and concomitant affirmation of their mettle. Eschewing both the sociological and psychological then, there isn’t really any *raison d’être* for this historical guide other than as entertainment. Curiouser still, as the audience for this book is more than likely composed of individuals who don’t enjoy reading.

Morituri – Yasmina Khadra (2003/1997) Toby Crime

The third installment of a trilogy of surreal hard boiled police procedurals featuring Algerian superintendent Brahim Llob. Relatively unknown in English speaking circles, Yasmina Khadra, the female pen name of a former Algerian army officer, is something of a cult figure in France. His prose is spare yet liberally sprinkled with mordant poetry – “A drizzle weeps for the fine evenings of yesteryear and trees tear out their tresses in melodramatic hysteria” and his stories aren’t so much spun as vomited forth. Imagine Chandler by way of Baudelaire and you have something of the flavor of Khadra. Although Chandler’s mean streets are nothing compared to those of the Algeria we walk down. Here, the flowers of evil are in full bloom and the light you sometimes see at the end of the tunnel is “only the reflection of Hell.” Here, terrorists blow up mothers so as to get to the sons attending the funeral. Here, the roads run red with blood and are littered with the horribly dismembered corpses. There’s a revolution going on but we don’t know who is fighting whom and for what we are fighting. Amidst the chaos and carnage, we wonder why the superintendent bothers. The superintendent wonders as well. Still, one must do something. Do something and hope for the best. So when Superintendent Llob

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is ordered to run down the kidnappers of the daughters of one of Algiers major movers and shakers, he takes the job without protest. Despite the understanding that no good can come of his investigations. For to move out of the relatively safe confines of police headquarters into the slums and strip joints and drug dens, is to move into an unreal world, a twilight kingdom, where death waits on every corner, lurks in every shadow.

Peril – Thomas H. Cook (2004) Bantam

Edgar Award winning novelist's latest journey into the heart of darkness is a marvelously suspenseful story and a bravura piece of storytelling. Beginning with a married woman's flight from Long Island and her abusive husband to the relative anonymity of Manhattan, Cook proceeds to introduce us to nearly a dozen characters, all of whom will eventually play a decided part in determining the fate of our fleeing heroine. Her name is Sara and her husband, Tony Labriola, is a reluctant lout, browbeaten

by his loansharking father, a psychopathic brute, into keeping her in line. Tony just wants Sara back. Labriola senior, however, wants retribution; he wants Sara punished, hurt real bad and his asking Tony and his factotum, Eddie, to reason not the reason for his rage, is at the heart of the matter. Sara knows what's up and that's why she's looking for a nowhere job. So she can stay lost. Sara only knows one thing, however and that's torch singing. Too high visibility, but she's running out of time and money and so when Abe, a nice-looking guy, offers her a job in his place in the West Village, Sara takes it. Meanwhile Labriola pere, through Eddie and the two men Eddie has hired, are closing in. Tony wants it all stopped and puts his own man on point. No one quite gets why the father is so out of joint. The reader will, however, and will understand early on; still, that's not the point to all of this. Peril's beauty lies in watching Cook masterfully interweave all the loose ends that his characters can't quite pick up and tie off.



The Angry Red Planet – (d)/(sp) Ib Melchior (1960):

From the brain-dead duo comprising producer Sid Pink and auteur Ib Melchior, the filmmakers responsible for *Reptilicus*, perhaps the worst dinosaur movie ever made, comes this remarkable sci-fi audacity about the first manned expedition to Mars. Despite possessing not a gross worth's of wit, *Angry Red Planet* nevertheless manages, in the final analysis, to be quite a bit of fun. For many many reasons. As it is the critic's duty to elaborate on such matters let us take, as our embarkation point, the four perso-

Movie Reviews

By Dominick Salemi

nas bravely boarding the spacecraft. They are first and foremost, silly people. So half-formed, so rudely stamped, as to make the characters on *H.R. Puffenstuf* appear Shakespearean by comparison. Amazing, as screenwriter Melchior supposedly honed his craft on Broadway. That must account for the fact that the movie is told entirely in flashback. In any event, Ib's dramatis personae are: Sam, a loveable imbecile mechanic, eternally optimistic, given to bad puns and to caressing his audio ray gun in an alarmingly lascivious manner; the professor, (Les Tremayne of *Zontar, Thing From Venus* fame) sporting a

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beatnik goatee, puffing on the ubiquitous pipe and given to spouting unintelligible scientific jargon; the commander, a hairy-chested, greasy pompadoured playboy eternally lusting for; Dr. Iris, a pneumatic red-headed botanist with the rear end of a wild jungle animal. Director Melchior apparently shares the commanders' opinion about Iris as he trains his camera on her shapely behind almost every chance he gets. The second joy to be had in the film is watching the basic laws of science flouted and trampled upon at every turn.

Now even if you were the kind of moron confused by the explanations of Mr. Wizard, it's probably even money that even you know that it is absolutely, never, not ever, a good thing to let people smoke on board a space ship!

You're more than likely aware from watching those Apollo missions, that at some point during the trip, gravity will be suspended. Not on this kooky ship! Something built into the craft called "constant acceleration" makes this concern unnecessary. However, the writers don't have an explanation for the space helmets failing to come equipped with face plates? Which could be a problem on a planet like Mars, the atmosphere of which isn't exactly oxygen enriched. And what gives with the spacesuits? They look like something you'd expect to find Gomer Pyle sporting at the Mayberry gas station. Thirdly, there is the dialogue. "Let's claim the planet in the name of Brooklyn." "If those Martians are out there, they must be invisible." "Maybe when we get back to

Earth, I can touch down with you." This is dialogue that would embarrass a four year old child. How is it possible a grown-up allowed himself to write such things? Fourthly, let us now damn with faint praise, the special effects. One of the monsters is nothing more than a pile of gelatin. One of the others has claws made from two by fours and is wheeled in. The Martian city is obviously a drawing and a bad one at that! The rocket ship must of cost all of \$1.38 – in today's prices – to make. Moreover, the reverse launch

from Mars looks exactly like the ship's lift off from Earth. That's not right, is it? But we digress, back to our story, which is the fifth joy to be had on this Angry Planet. And it is quite ridiculous. Although things move so slowly at first the viewer



might not realize how ridiculous until the craft touches down on Mars. Still, all will be forgiven, because once the crew hits the red planet, everything starts to get real gone. Real angry like! Almost immediately, a giant three-eyed blob monster appears at the window throwing Irish, the "girl" into a crying and screaming jag. Then the crew isn't out on the shifting sands more than five minutes before they are attacked by a giant spider with a baby bat face! Oh wait, first there's the matter of the man-eating rubbery plants. Hard to keep it all straight, as the Mars sequences, having been filmed thru this pink filter, are rendered rather indistinct and terribly hazy. Pretty boss, though. Very very psychedelic. Eventually, our intrepid quartet, sens-

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ing danger all around them, retreat to the ship. Rather than blast off, as almost anyone possessing a modicum of intelligence would however, the crew decide to go back outside, inflate a rubber dinghy and row their way across a vast lake. Suffice to say, things go from bad to worse and only the playboy O'Bannion and the hot-to-trot Iris survive; but not before we run into more monsters, much soul searching and a couple of dozen close-ups of Iris' derriere. It's impossible not to be amused by such earnest idiocy especially, when all the film asks of its audience is for it to just . . . let go and reason not the reason.

In Hell aka The Savage – (d) Ringo Lam (sp) Jorge Alvarez, Eric James Virgets (2003)

Ringo Lam followed John Woo to these shores with a reputation almost as big in the action-adventure field due primarily to *Cities On Fire*. Well, after *Replicant*, *Maximum Risk* and now this muddled, mixed-up prison flick, we'll say it if Ringo won't: your days of directing big-budget Hollywood films are over. Which Ringo probably knows as his latest assignment was this Jean-Claude Van Damme potboiler and Van Damme has been over for about a decade now. Anyway, enough with the kvetching. Van Damme plays someone with the ridiculous name of Kyle Lord, a honcho at a petrochemical plant in Russia who finds himself slapped with a life sentence in a vile prison after blowing away the man who raped and killed his wife. This brutal and senseless bit of exposition which opens the film, goes on way past the point of pointlessness and, unfortunately, serves to establish the dominant mindset of Lam's film. Which is, if one must pick a theme in a movie that desperately attempts at every moment to establish one, is that loutishness begets loutishness. Not too terribly profound, mind you, and as this is a genre exercise, we're not asking for too terribly much. We certainly aren't asking for miracles. But here they come provided courtesy of Damme as Christ. Oh yes he is Jesus too! He grows a full beard and very long hair and takes to dressing in tattered white schmattes. Then J.C. jettisons his

soul by fasting and scourging while in solitary, emerges from lock-up as a mindless brawler (the warden has a full contact scam going inside the prison), proceeds to kill a man by tearing his jugular out with his teeth. Apres ca, J.C. morphs into a peacenik, refuses to fight and is symbolically crucified. Sound like our Savior to you? Wait, there's more. Van Damme is again reborn, this time as a prophet with the ability to soothe the savage beast and drive out demons from the possessed. We kid you not! Nor do we kid you about the whole mess being narrated by New York legendary psycho linebacker, Lawrence Taylor, playing the part of an glowering, taciturn Zen inmate. And thanks too to Lam allowing the fight scenes to eschew kung' fu balletics for down-and-dirty pier-six brawling. Kudos also to casting Michael Bailey Smith as the male rapist and chief evil bastard as he's even scarier than hell-spawn chop-sockey demon Bolo Yeung.

Devil Girl From Mars – (d) David Macdonald (sp) Edward J. Danziger, Harry Lee (1954)

The only scary thing about this wonderful badfilm is that it began life as a play. Yes, somewhere in the sceptered isle, birthplace of the bard of Avon, a playwright, had the temerity to ask people to pay for the privilege of watching actors trod the boards in a melodrama about female Martians seeking lusty young men with whom to mate. Why the Martians' advance scouting ship decides to touch down in a remote area of Scotland to begin their search is a mystery. Maybe the invaders figured that as so many of the Scotch are heavy drinkers they'd have little trouble enticing the men to return with them. Glasgow? Edinburgh? Mars? What's the friggin' difference? Has anybody got a pint? Nevertheless, the Martians, without even the offer of a wee dram to anyone, decide to leave nothing to chance and to take the pick of the litter by force. Which should not be necessary if all the Martian women look like the one leading the advance party, as she is, to coin the patois of the Scots, "pretty damn hot." The advance dame calls herself Nyah (Nigh-uh), calls her

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robot Chani, and her outfit? Well, let's just call it "killer." Everything's made with black leather and it's very very kinky. Skullcap with earflaps, thigh high boots, body-stocking, jumpsuit ending in a mini. Take me to your leader, baby. Please baby, please. Please baby, please. Baby baby, please.

The men, in the local inn where Nyah first makes her appearance, seem not to be so thrilled. The viewer is never sure why this is. Sure one of them, the henpecked co-owner of the inn with his harridan wife, is an elderly drunk. But what about the alcoholic reporter? Or the recently escaped, falsely-accused murderer? Oh right, the reporter has just fallen in love with Hazel Court, a model running away from the "life." And the murderer is in love with the bartendress. So Nyah is all dressed up and no one wants to go with her. Naturally, Nyah gets righteously angry and has her robot Chani – a refrigerator box with a police globe for a head – blow up a barn and a number of trees to show she means business. Business meaning that either the murderer or reporter has to go back with her or its curtains for everyone. Including a little peeping tom pre-adolescent Nyah has captured with the help of her death stick. Mars needs men. Badly. Terribly badly. You see, the women have taken over the planet – kind of reminds you of the English-speaking countries, doesn't it? – and because of that, the men just can't find a reason to get excited about the women anymore. It is a puzzlement to Nyah, (who reveals to all that she is something of a bigwig intellectual on her home planet,) as is the fact that drunken earthmen apparently have little interest in garishly dressed exotic looking women. She asks the scientist who arrived with the reporter why this is so, but he can only mumble into his Glenfidich.

Devil Girl From Mars may have played badly on its initial release, viewed today, however, it cannot help but charm. It asks us to affirm that matriarchy is an abomination, a reversal of the natural order of things, one which can only lead to the inevitable destruction of the human race. Thus the ineffectiveness of Nyah's lascivious

dress and otherworldly look on the male gaze. What the screenwriters are saying is that no matter how beautiful and mysterious the female makes herself, it's just not going to work unless said female assents to male dominance. To ask otherwise, to have the male respond by thanking the woman for objectifying herself and as a gift, a compromise, surrender his natural dominance of the woman, is to risk not just male indifference but the death of the male sex drive. Terribly, terribly heavy but, as almost anyone who has ever been in a loving relationship realizes, it's the sharing of power that makes things work, the occasional surrender to that which is greater than yourself, i.e., the power of the female, that puts the "sexy" in a sexual relationship. Here, that notion is obliterated. The reporter falls for the model – a supernally fetching Hazel Court – and the escaped convict adheres to the going-nowhere barmaid – because the females accept a subordinate's role. It's about obeisance to the male keeping the planet populated. Which is why we have the crone who runs the inn and her alcoholic husband ragged, deferring to his inebriated authority when Nyah makes things tough. It's a man's man's man's world and to act in contradistinction to that is to court disaster. A laughable notion for anyone outside the Taliban.

Dark Eyes of London (1939) – (d) Walter Summers (sp) Patrick Kirwin, Walter Summers and John Argyle

Pathe Films attempt to make a horror film that would make make Britishers forget The Ghoul. Which they more than likely already had, as The Ghoul, despite the presence of Boris Karloff is something of a stinker. In any case, Pathe went ahead with this adaptation of an Edgar Wallace story and ended up with something almost good. Dark Eyes doesn't work as a horror film. That's because it's more of a police procedural with horror elements. And as a police procedural it doesn't really work that well either as the police are continually shown seeking to uncover things the audience has long since discovered. Nevertheless, this potboiler entertains,

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despite remarkable lapses in continuity and a number of longeurs. Bela Lugosi is quite effective in his last meaty role before being consigned to poverty row productions. He simply oozes meance as Dr. Orloff, a murderous, smooth-talking insurance agent.

What *Dark Eyes* also has going for it are menacing atmospherics and some genuinely shocking scenes. It's going to be a long time before you forget Lugosi blowing some poor schmiel's ears out with hopped-up wires or the look of benign satisfaction on Bela as he slowly and lovingly drowns a man in an oversized tub. This may not be enough for today's jaded viewer but careful viewing will reveal fluid and inventive camerawork and some memorable set design, the latter seen to best effect in the home for blind vagrants used by Lugosi as a front for his nefarious operations. Peopled with corpse-like workers shuffling amidst crumbling mortar, decaying brickwork and huge wavy stalks of flax, the charitable workhouse is not so much a place of refuge as a mirror reflecting the sordid and inhuman soul of its proprietor. (And this Mr. Dearborn, with his fashionable shades, his Inverness coat and soft melancholic voice, who claims to be running the home, just what does he know about the nefarious Lugosi? Is he truly in the dark behind those spectral glasses?)

The film itself had a tortured history. Originally released in 1939 in England, it was almost immediately slapped with an "H" for "horror" by the British censors, making it unavailable for viewing for those under sixteen. One year later, it was picked up by skid row production company Monogram and released stateside as *The Human Monster*. The public was aghast and the Catholic Legion of Decency awarded the film its dreaded "B" rating, "objectionable in part for all" foremost for its "excessive brutality and gruesomeness." While this may seem laughable today; nevertheless, given the context of the times, the almost clinical detachment in the shock sequences, and Lugosi's rather unsettling performance, one can readily understand what all the fuss was about.

Rocketship X-M (1950) (d/s) Kurt Neumann

Unbeknownst to most genre fans, the director of *The Fly* (1958) and *Kronos* (1957) slapped together this nifty little rocketeer flick for next to nothing thanks to the help of an exploitation producer who desperately wanted to beat George Pal's *Destination Moon* into the movie theatres. Which Neumann and company did, and turned out an entertaining space opera that beats the more famous Pal film all to hell in the process. Although it is a bit unfair to compare the two, as the crew, led by shellacked-headed Lloyd Bridges, screws up with the rocket boosters and ends up on Mars. Undaunted by severely overshooting their mark, Bridges and his mates set out to explore the Red Planet (we say red because the film stock is tinted red for these sequences) and find the remnants of an advanced civilization destroyed by internecine atomic warfare. More problematic for our intrepid explorers however, are the things that have de-evolved afterwards: savage, hulking cave dwellers with severe anxiety disorders. Before Lloyd and friends manage even a "Boy, Howdy!" the maleficent Martian mutants start hurling huge stones at the earthling invaders, killing two of the crew and severely wounding another. This should not have happened had our astronauts weapons other than shot and handguns, but there you are. Obviously, the people planning the trip did not expect the crew to run into alienated aliens when the moon was the target point. Then again, why bring weapons at all? Tis a mystery. Anyway, Bridges and a sultry, beautifully coifed scientist manage to drag their wounded comrade back to the ship and blast off but, in a decidedly downbeat ending, run out of fuel, crash into earth and subsequently shuffle off their mortal coils. Don't be too sad, before they hit terra firma, the lovely scientist declares her love for Bridges in so many words and asks her to hold him. That's so romantic: hugging just before you blow up. Don't you think? Yes, it sounds ridiculous but the film is nicely paced, cleverly shot and contains a haunting film score courtesy of Ferde Grofe, composer of *The Grand Canyon Suite*,

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who makes effective use of the theremin.

Fast Company (1979) – (d) David Cronenberg (sp) David Cronenberg et al

The great lost Cronenberg film that should have stayed lost! Well, maybe not, as it is perfect drive-in fare for a number of reasons. First, because it's about dragsters and funny cars. Secondly, because there's tons of footage of funny cars and dragsters racing and blowing up, some of which puts the camera inside the autos. Thirdly, because they show lots of close-ups of guys working on the souped-up engines. That should be enough right there but we also have legendary B-movie actors William Smith, John Saxon (do you know he actually made a film with Marlon Brando?) and Claudia Jennings. And while the story ain't much, it fits classic drive-in rule numero uno by being completely comprehensible no matter where you come in. Smith gets top billing over Saxon for some unearthly reason as Lonnie "Lucky Man" Johnson the star of Fastco Oil Company's drag racing team. John Saxon is the unscrupulous slime-ball track representative whose sole purpose in life appears to be nothing more than screwing and screwing other people over. When Smith's dragster blows up in a qualifier, Saxon convinces him to take over the funny car driving from an up and coming star for the sake of the company. Smith agrees but only because Saxon promises him that a new dragster is on the way. Saxon is lying, of course, and why Smith can't see this is anybody's guess as it's as plain as the receding hairline on Saxon's head. Smith eventually does discover the truth and when he does, he smears the oil company during an interview which results in Saxon firing him. This isn't enough for Saxon, so he sabotages Smith's car during a race and then has a mechanic club Smith over the head so as to facilitate the theft of the car. Smith and company decide to steal the car back which results in a throw down challenge kind of thing at the next venue and several spectacular explosions including one with Saxon in a piper cub. Oh, Jennings and the girls? Cronenberg employs

them for window dressing only. They're here to coo over the men and get naked. Any time. Any place. No matter how cavalierly the men act. That's right, the guys can pick up whomever they want and the women are supposed to turn a blind eye in the interests of standing by their man. It's enough to make Tammy Wynette puke. Which surely she would have done after watching the scene in which Smith haphazardly tosses Jennings in his bed immediately after another couple is good-naturedly thrown out of it after spending all night sleeping and fornicating in it. Ever heard of clean sheets, Mr. Smith? Geez, that's more objectionable than anything on view in Crash.

St. John's Wort aka Otogiriso (2001) – (d) Shimoyama Ten (sp) Goro Nakajima

Nami, a talented young art working American distributors are trying to push this Japanese digital video production as the next Ringu (remade as the smash horror hit The Ring in Hollywood). Not too terribly surprising, when you discover that the producer of this film was also the producer of the aforementioned film. While intermittently entertaining, and cleverly shot and edited, Otogiriso lacks the coherence, literacy and persistence of vision of Ringu. Nami, a talented young artists working for a punk video game company is at the center of St. John's Wort. Her current project involves a haunted house game based on persistent visions she has been experiencing in her dreams. As St. John's opens, Nami discovers that she has inherited a ruined forest mansion far from her recently deceased father. Seeing a great tie-in for the game, Nami drives out to the estate with her co-worker and former boyfriend, Kohei. On arriving, Nami discovers that her inheritance is the source of her nocturnal visions. Moreover, she actually remembers having spent a great deal of time here as a child. That and something about a twin sister. Once inside, after being given the keys by a mysterious and taciturn groundskeeper, things go from bad to worse for Nami and Kohei. Apparently, Nami's father was a dark fantasy

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painter. Which isn't so bad, in and of itself. What is bad, is the apparent fact that the father was given to torturing little children as a means of inspiration. Nami and Kohei learn this when they find several mummified little bodies in the house. As if this wasn't bad enough, a sudden storm hits, floods the isolated road out, and the power goes out. Oh yes, and the groundskeeper goes off his rocker and decides he wants the pair dead. At which point the movie goes completely off the boards: Nami and Kohei decide not to call the police but rather, to call their compatriots at game headquarters and have them download the blueprints they found on the house computer. Why? So they can continue plotting their game and to uncover the secrets of the decaying house of horrors. Still, it takes a while for all of this to unfold, and before it does, the viewer is fitfully amused with all the cinematic tricks and digital effects the director has in his magic bag. The idea, with the animated digital effects, constant screen discolorations, black and white camera-eye views, jump cuts and film speed changes, is to remind you that this is a video game; that it's the look, the feel, not the story that is important. To underscore this, Nami and Kohei are constantly given "keys" to hidden doors via computer by game command headquarters (another guy and a gal, doppelgangers, get it?). It's not enough, in the end, to rescue a hackneyed, poorly told non-story, but it will sure wow you for the first 45 minutes or so.

The Incredible Petrified World (1959) – (d) Jerry Warren (sp) John W. Sterner

Jerry "Teenage Zombies" Warren and John Carradine! Need the Brutarian staff say more? Perhaps we must, as it is our job to belabor the obvious and effectively make the case for the entertainment value of inept and best forgotten films. We'll start by telling you that director Warren had little in the way of script when he found Carradine to be available. Warren, always with his eye on the bottom line, didn't tear up the screenplay and start over. Oh no, he simply expanded Carradine's part by adding a

number of pat speeches incorporating all manner of scientific gobbledegook and asked the game veteran to try and enunciate without breaking down into hysterical laughter. Which Carradine somehow manages to do in this ur-tale about a diving-bell expedition going awry and landing three scientists and a news reporter in a strange underground rock cavern. Don't ask why Carradine, who designed the bell, wasn't in the bell when it was dropped. Or why Carradine isn't in the second bell that is dumped into the drink in an ad hoc rescue mission. Or why all the survivors' clothes remain clean and pressed and the women's make-up fails to run. In fact, don't ask anything, because not a bit of Petrified World makes a lick of sense. On any level. The actors seem to sense this as well and spend much of the time avoiding looking directly into the camera. Or maybe it was just wishful thinking brought on by our terrible embarrassment for all concerned. Nevertheless, if looked at from a technical standpoint, it's kind of fascinating to deconstruct this thing. Much of the film is composed of stock footage – underwater scenes of marine life and scuba divers' kicking up their fins, volcanic eruptions, static shots of the Arizona cavern where much of this was lensed – and about a third of it has Carradine walking and talking and generally looking busy. That leaves about forty minutes or so for even the guiltiest filmmaker to toss in something, anything, to keep our interest. Warren claims there was supposed to be a monster but the suit shrunk in the Arizona heat; still, that doesn't explain the fact that nothing, absolutely nothing happens, once our beleaguered quartet hit the "petrified world." And this, in the end, is what makes this exercise so entertaining: the total absence of anything that might be thought of as entertaining. People move and say things, but to no end and for no apparent purpose. The scenes change, yet everything remains the same as everything is invested with the same meaning. Which is no meaning. This is fascinating. This is unbelievable. This is nauseating. Sartre would no doubt approve.

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**Witches' Hammer (1969) – (d)Otakar Vavra
(sp) Vaclav Kaplicky et al**

Here's a film for these perilous times: a political allegory in the guise of historical drama centering on the waning years of witch hunting in 17th Century Czechoslovakia. Although the American distributors are pushing Hammer as a gory exploitation film in the mold of Mark of the Devil, this Czech effort looks more to Carl Dreyer's *Passion of Joan of Arc* for inspiration. There's plenty of comely nudity and some rather tame scenes of torture but make no mistake, this is an art film. A damn good art film, with subtle acting, adroit cinematography, expressive lighting and a mise-en-scene cleverly and sublimely blurring the already indistinct line between good and evil, reality and fiction, religion and fascism. So much so in the latter case, that torture sequences and interrogations eventually take on the look and feel of the Catholic mass: the rack substituting for the cross, the rote accusations of the judges transmogrified into antiphon by the accused, the inquisitors dress coming more and more to resemble vestments, the prison chambers with their somber, hushed air and multitude of candles morphing, literally and figuratively, into a cathedral. Even the ghastly intercuts of a hooded skeletal monk reciting passages from the *Malleus Maleficarum* through horribly rotting teeth comes less and less of a shock over the course of the film as the viewer is brought to to the realization that this is a recitation of religious creed. Against this symbolic backdrop, we have a story of the evil unscrupulous men wreck when good men do nothing. It's not much of a story, and it shamelessly cribs from *The Crucible*; still, watching a hopelessly corrupt inquisitor turn an idyllic little town into a virtual death camp, a paranoid hell where no one is above suspicion, not even the pious and virtuous village priest, would make for fascinating viewing even without the artistry with which *Witches' Hammer* is graced. The fact that the film contains more than a bit of the sublime and the poetic, despite its subject matter, makes it all the more remarkable.

**The Lost Skeleton of Cadavra (2001) – (d/sp)
Larry Blamire**

The critics sort of got it right when they talked up *Lost Skeleton* as a loving parody of 50s B-movies as director-screenwriter Larry Blamire does have a great deal of affection for trashy 50s flicks. Still, *Lost Skeleton* isn't a parody of B-movies so much as a re-creation of, and riff on, Grade-Z atrocities like *Robot Monster* and *Plan 9 From Outer Space*. To one not schooled in the ways of bad film, this may seem to be a meaningless distinction. Most of the drive-in fare of the Eisenhower era, however, had fairly capable acting and decent production values. Bert Gordon and Ed Wood Jr. fare had neither. Additionally, they were burdened by the disadvantage of screenplays which appeared to have been written either by semi-literates, children, or the mentally disturbed. That's why these films fascinate: they are so wrong on so many levels you could watch them a dozen times and still find things to astound and mystify you. Films like *Attack of the Giant Leeches* or *Invisible Invaders* are dreadful, sure, but there's something akin to recognizable human intelligence there and so they never reach the sublime level of incompetence of, say, *The Amazing Colossal Man*. Blamire understands the difference, and thus plays it relatively straight; that is, he doesn't exaggerate to make his points or to get laughs. It isn't necessary when everything is ludicrous; all you have to do is just let things be and let it all roll downhill. Ergo, take one story that has an Ozzy and Harriet scientist and wife team running through remote parkland chasing down a meteor loaded with a special substance called atmospherium. Throw in an alien couple looking for the same substance to jump start their downed spacecraft. Mix in a maleficent doctor also on the hunt for the stuff in an effort to revive the lost skeleton of the title and . . . And what more is really necessary? Well, you ask the actors to not emote badly exactly, but instead ask them to pretend they are former minor stars doing dinner theatre. Or if they are to perform a seductive primitive dance as *Animala* does, request that she make it

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silly but somehow sexy. Then you give all the characters, even the skeleton, dialogue which is inane but clearly shows your erudition and love of semantics. So when the scientist talks to his wife about his research he doesn't engage in the kind of pseudo-scientific babble you find in *Mesa of Lost Women*, he tells her he is doing "science" and this "science" involves a lot of work that is very "scientific" and could advance the cause of "science." Or something like that. You get the point. If you don't, carefully watch the scene where the alien couple, two advanced beings with cosmic intellects who speak pseudo-Elizabethan English, ponder the nature of stairs and a door. We're talking about obviousness that does not realize it's pathetic character. The filmmakers get this and this is the reason the strings aren't hidden on the walking skeleton, the spaceship is clearly made from a toilet roll, the mutant monster's eyes don't work, said monstrosity is wearing shoes, and many scenes are shot on grainy film stock. So I suppose one could call *Lost Skeleton* a parody as all of this is done on a conscious and not unconscious level; nevertheless to do "good" badness you have to have taste and intelligence. Refined taste and acute intelligence. Which is what you'll find in almost every frame of *Lost Skeleton*.

In My Skin (2002) – (d/sp) Marina de Van

Esther sports an attentive, handsome lover, a job bringing her no end of satisfaction, an apartment in a fashionable section of Paris, and a bewitching face and figure. The world is certainly her oyster! Until, one night at a chi chi party, Esther falls and cuts herself while perambulating on a construction site in the backyard. The party turns out to be a bore but her cut, which is more serious than she thought and will require several stitches, first fascinates and later, sexually arouses her. Esther has found herself. Or, rather, found the self that needs to cut and mutilate. The self that longs to drink the blood issuing from rough handling. The dark side hungering to savor and lick the skin sliced and peeled from a lithe-some body. Normally, this would be the stuff of

exploitive horror; however, these are the French and maitenant, we must make of this grand poetry, ask of our characters that they make themselves familiar mais somewhat incongruous, demand our cinematography ravish us even with the grotesque, and endow the screenplay avec en detached, philosophical air of inquiry. Making it all impossible to turn away even though one must watch much of this with one's hands over one's eyes. Although after many graphic and unbearably oneiric scenes of sawing and slicing one is lead to the inevitable question: "Just what the hell am I watching here?" A drama maudit? An exercise in existentialism? A giant pot of merde flung in our smug bourgeoisie faces? You long, so long to despise this fashionable, sensitive and intelligent woman for jeopardizing her life, her career, her relationship. A curious thing though: the deeper she sinks into paroxysms of ecstasy while cutting and ravaging and gradually losing control, the less you begin to hate, the more you begin to empathize. In *My Skin* is about addiction as delusion, as an *idée fixe*, the kind that tells you to keep going deeper because eventually you'll break on through to the other side. So you let it take hold and you give yourself and your life over to it. More and more and more, until there is nothing else and it is just you and your obsession. C'est tout! Nothing else, just that constant need, and release that is not quite release, just a slight diminution of pressure. A lessening allowing one a continued preoccupation with the heighteneing fever. This, despite the growing realization that there is no breaking through, only a complete breakdown. A slow slide into madness and oblivion. Lovely the way the film shows this by splitting into two near the end - no dialogue, no sound, just images of bloody clothing and cutting tools and more blood and blood on the tools, and blood on the sheets, and then two eyes and finally our subject, lying on the hotel room bed in a fetal position, staring blankly into the camera.

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